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## SUMMARY

This thesis examines the major experimental novels of Virginia Woolf in the light of the theoretical work of Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan and contemporary French feminist theorists, particularly Julia Kristeva. It aims to demonstrate that in Woolf's work a modernist investigation of the crisis of the self coincides with the quest for a specifically feminine mode of writing. It answers Anglo-American feminists who have seen these novels as a withdrawal from social experience by showing that these texts engage and interrogate the very forms and categories -- patriarchal, in Woolf's view -- of such experience. This Woolfian project anticipates and is illuminated by the critique of representation in literary theory after structuralism. Her modernist works seek to find a voice for all that is repressed -- the unconscious, or Kristeva's semiotic -- in the dominant society. But to dissolve or deconstruct patriarchal categories and unleash the repressed is only one aspect of Woolf's project. She also seeks to maintain a place and voice for a subject coherent enough to be an effective social agent, and Kristeva's dialectic between semiotic and thetic phases serves as a model for examining Woolf's own concept of androgyny.

Woolf's experimental short stories and Jacob's Room partake in, yet decisively problematize, the quest for full meaning or symbol. The elegiac tone of this novel becomes the more positive enactment of schizophrenic modes of being in Mrs. Dalloway and the undoing of the philosopher Ramsay by 'feminine' modes of metaphor in To the Lighthouse. Orlando is Woolf's major expression of her ideal of androgyny, a dialectic of values that previously were more rigidly polarized. The Waves partially returns to the concerns of Jacob's Room, revealing that the Utopian dialectic in part remains a painful ambivalence, but articulating its own impressive theoretical understanding of issues embodied in practice in Orlando.

Feminine Writing and the Problem of the Self:  
an Examination of Virginia Woolf's Novels in  
the Light of Recent Critical and Psychoanalytic  
Theories

Makiko Minow Pinkney

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Department of English

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## PREFACE

Central to my analysis of Woolf's work are five novels: Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, Orlando, The Waves. These are written in pursuit of Woolf's modernist project, but as I shall argue below, her modernism was at the same time a feminist subversion of conventions, and I will analyze the ways in which Woolf actually effects this fusion of her concerns in her texts. I will concentrate on her fiction in this thesis, an area of her work that has been, surprisingly, comparatively underemphasized in the recent, intense revival of interest in Woolf. Directed towards her centenary in 1982, the revival has at its centre a 'family' industry which includes Quentin Bell's biography, the publication of Woolf's innumerable letters and diaries, and previously unpublished material. As a consequence of this extensive, new access to Woolf's personal life, there has flourished a biographical and psycho-analytical criticism, but this latter has tended to focus on her actual mental illness rather than the possibilities of new readings of her texts, a relative neglect which this thesis hopes, to a degree, to remedy. The linkage of psychoanalysis and Woolf is not an arbitrary one, since the Hogarth Press has been Freud's English publisher since 1921. Leonard himself reviewed Freud's Psychopathology of Everyday Life. Though she was never treated by Freudian psychoanalysts, Woolf did meet Freud when he took refuge in England just before the war. It is not until towards the end of the 1930s that we can be certain, from the entries in her diary and her reading notebooks, that Woolf was actually reading Freud.<sup>1</sup> Yet we can sense the great impact of Freudian psychoanalysis in her references to 'our psychoanalytical age'(CE II 142). She wrote a review called 'Freudian Fiction', in which she showed her dissatisfaction, not with Freud's own discoveries, nor with the principle of their use in fiction, but with the way a particular novelist (J. D. Beresford) had done so: 'It simplifies rather than complicates, detracts rather enriches'(CW, 154). I shall seek to heed this caveat in

the studies that follow.

Contemporary feminism has, since the seventies, given impetus to this prodigious revival of interest in Woolf; its recent major emphasis has been the re-assessment of Woolf as a radical political thinker. Feminist assessments of Woolf's aesthetics (E. Showalter, Sidney Jane Kaplan)<sup>2</sup> have often been on the whole negative, fundamentally continuous with the criticism of her by the politically committed writers of the 1930's or of Scrutiny: Virginia Woolf as hypersensitive, as a sheltered invalid lady unable to cope with a harsh 'reality'. A pioneer book by Herbert Marder in 1968 stressed the crucial importance of feminism in Woolf's art: 'far from being a mere excrescence on her work, feminism... is essential to her conception of reality.'<sup>3</sup> But the major shift in evaluation was initiated by American feminists around Jane Marcus, who aim to revolutionize the commonly accepted accounts of Woolf by emphasizing the political dimensions of her writing.<sup>4</sup> These recent books and articles have valuably uncovered previously unknown or repressed aspects of Woolf, which offer the possibility of a new and fuller comprehension of her literary endeavours. Yet, because these works are eager to dispel the old image of ethereal aestheticism, they tend to eschew fullscale dealings with Woolf's formal experimentation, that series of works from Jacob's Room to The Waves which have conventionally been regarded as quintessentially Woolfian, which have supported the image of her work as beautiful, pure artefact, subjectivistic and hypersensitive. What is needed now is to radicalize the reading of precisely these novels and of the aesthetic behind them, and I have sought to bring the resources of contemporary critical and psychoanalytic theories upon them, stressing those aspects of theory which seem to me most germane and illuminating for each particular novel.

I shall argue that Woolf's series of major experimental works, which are traditionally assigned to a gender-free category of 'modernism', can

be interpreted as a quest for what she refers to as a 'woman's sentence' that would allow 'a woman [to] write exactly as she wishes to write',<sup>5</sup> and what I refer to, in my title and throughout this thesis, as 'feminine writing'. Both modernism and literary feminism - projects which, as I shall suggest below, are uniquely conjoined in Woolf - are a questioning of a previously dominant mode of writing, and the crisis of narrative that they represent is also a crisis of the self. Lacanian psychoanalysis illuminates this crisis of the subject by bringing Freud's work into relation with structuralist theories of language, and allows us to define feminine writing as a concern which addresses itself to the position of mastery maintained in the order of discourse. The 'feminine' can then be seen as the subversion of a mastery guaranteed by the 'Cartesian' subject or self which also sustains the narrative conventions that Woolf's experimental novels so effectively interrogate. Far from being a flight from social commitment into an arcane modernism, her experimental texts can, I shall argue, best be seen as a feminist subversion of the deepest formal principles - of the definitions of narrative, writing, the self - of a patriarchal social order.

I would like to thank Dr. John Rignall for his valuable supervision and kind, patient support during the long and sometimes troubled years of my research; without him this thesis would never have been completed. And I should like to thank my husband, Tony Pinkney, for cycling into the gale.

## ABBREVIATIONS

(Full details of publication are given in the Bibliography)

<u>CE</u>	<u>Collected Essays.</u>
<u>CW</u>	<u>Contemporary Writers.</u>
<u>H</u>	<u>Virginia Woolf: The Waves, the Two Holograph Drafts,</u> transcribed and edited by J.W. Graham.
<u>HH</u>	<u>A Haunted House and Other Stories.</u>
<u>L</u>	<u>The Letters of Virginia Woolf,</u> edited by Nigel Nicolson.
<u>MD</u>	<u>Mrs. Dalloway.</u>
<u>O</u>	<u>Orlando.</u>
<u>QB</u>	<u>Virginia Woolf: A Biography</u> by Quentin Bell.
<u>RO</u>	<u>A Room of One's Own.</u>
<u>TL</u>	<u>To the Lighthouse.</u>
<u>VO</u>	<u>The Voyage Out.</u>
<u>W</u>	<u>The Waves.</u>
<u>WD</u>	<u>A Writers Diary,</u> edited by Leonard Woolf.



## CHAPTER I: Feminism and Modernism in Woolf

Virginia Woolf's essay 'Modern Novels', which under its later title 'Modern Fiction' became so famous as a manifesto of literary modernism<sup>1</sup> and which constitutes the prelude to Woolf's own most distinctive artistic achievement, was not a sudden revolutionary argument with no wider literary context. By the time of its publication in the Times Literary Supplement in April 1919, four volumes of Dorothy Richardson's Pilgrimage had been published (Woolf reviewed the fourth of these, The Tunnel, in February 1919) and James Joyce's Ulysses had appeared in instalments in The Little Review. In the same periodical, one year before Woolf's 'Modern Novels', May Sinclair had published a full explication and assessment of Dorothy Richardson's novels, using, probably for the first time in a literary context, the term 'stream-of-consciousness'; it is known that Woolf read this and made notes from it for her own essay.<sup>2</sup> In Some Contemporary Novelists (Women) published in 1920, R. Brimley Johnson discussed an emerging trend among the female novelists of the early twentieth century: '[She] has abandoned the old realism...She is seeking, with passionate determination, for that Reality which is behind the material, the things that matter, spiritual things, ultimate Truth. And here she finds man an outsider, wilfully blind, purposely indifferent'.<sup>3</sup> It is not clear if Brimley Johnson had read Woolf's 'Modern Novels', but clearly his account of this 'New Realism' which searches for a new vision or Truth behind the veil of masculine materialism and of which Richardson is the foremost practitioner shows a strong affinity with Woolf's own demand for a new literature. But for Woolf herself at this stage, this new literary vision pertains to a new generation; it is not gender-specific. She periodizes literary history by the reign of monarchs - spiritual Georgians against crassly materialistic Edwardians - not by the difference between sexes.

The literary transformations around 1920 have more recently been connected by Elaine Showalter to the rise of 'a female aesthetic': a new

consciousness which 'reversed the orthodox argument that women have limited experience by defining reality as subjective'. 'Novels written by early twentieth century women were', she continues, 'anti-male, both in the sense that they attacked "male" technology, law, and politics, and that they belittle masculine morality'.<sup>4</sup> Certainly Dorothy Richardson had emphatically defined her aesthetic as feminine in the foreword she wrote in 1938 to Pilgrimage: 'attempting to produce a feminine equivalent of the current masculine realism'.<sup>5</sup> For Richardson, this feminine realism is superior in that it can reach a deeper reality because of the intuitive, immediate, pluralistic nature of female consciousness.

It is clear that, while other contemporary commentators (including Wyndham Lewis)<sup>6</sup> stressed the feminist dimension, Woolf's own declarations of literary identity repress a potential feminist awareness and universalize the issue into the Oedipal polemic of the generations. And it was true, after all, that many male writers (Joyce, Eliot, Strachey, Forster, Lawrence) were committed to literary projects more or less related to female 'New Realism'. Woolf sees a danger across the whole range of modernism, which is however, significantly exacerbated for the woman writer. Though one does well to reject the dessicated objectivism of realist conventions, there then looms the trap of the 'egotistical self; which ruins Joyce and Richardson': 'becoming as in Joyce and Richardson, narrowing and restricting'(WD, 23). Together with this 'cramp and confinement of personality, (CE, 2:159) the subjectivistic concentration on self tends to produce what Woolf terms 'self-consciousness' - the sudden literary lapse from image to statement, from the concrete enactments of experience to shrill social protest. All outsiders, the oppressed, the marginal, are necessarily vulnerable to this vice; American writers, women, working men, negroes, or anyone 'who for some other reason is conscious of disability'(CE, 2:144) tends thus to

violate the organic textures of the literary work. The pressures are particularly acute on women, however, vitiating aspects of the work even of geniuses like Charlotte Brontë or George Eliot, let alone innumerable lesser women writers. Woolf believes that relative improvements in the socio-economic position of women have started to free them from self-consciousness. If the male writer suffers self-consciousness as an aspect of the general experience of modernity, with its dissolution of tradition, its sceptical, even nihilistic testing of old sanctities and pieties, then clearly the woman writer's sense of the injustice of women's position in society, with its temptations of bitterness, denunciation, resentment, reinforces the danger.

Woolf's second dissatisfaction with the modernist text concerns its fragmentation. In her review of Dorothy Richardson, she had applauded her literary technique, which attains 'a sense of reality far greater than that produced by the ordinary means', yet she also complains of a lack of 'some unity, significance, or design' which 'we should perceive in the helter-skelter of flying fragments'. Woolf's aesthetic demands that 'the flying helter-skelter resolves itself by degrees into a perceptible whole' (CW, 121). From this point of view, the distortions or stridencies produced by social self-consciousness are just one aspect of the more general chaotic dispersal of the modernist work. By contrast, the two desiderata of impersonality and synthesis or totality constitute what Woolf terms 'poetry'.

In 1929, when Woolf for the first time fully discusses women and fiction, she hopes that improvements in the economical and educational conditions of women will encourage 'the greater impersonality of women's lives' and thus result in 'poetry' in women's fiction: 'It will lead them to be less absorbed in facts and no longer content to record...their own observation. They will look beyond the personal and political relationships to the wider questions which the poet tries to solve - of our destiny and the meaning of life' (CE, 2:147). In 'The Art of Fiction'

(1927) Woolf speculates on the possibility of the novel becoming 'a work of art', aspiring beyond its traditionally mimetic or derivative relationship - 'a parasite' - towards life. In 'The Narrow Bridge of Art' (1927), she suggests an 'unnamed variety of the novel' (it is to be actualized as The Waves), which will be poetry but not written in verse, dramatic and yet not a play. She emphasizes that it will 'stand further back from life', (CE,2:224-225). Her insistence on abolishing the sociological realism of an Arnold Bennett is consistent with her earlier challenges to Edwardianism in 'Modern Fiction' or 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown', but this concept of 'poetry' marks a further break from any kind of realism, for in the earlier essays Woolf was still talking in terms of 'reality', 'trueness to life'. 'Without life nothing else is worthwhile'(CE,2:105) - there is no disagreement on this in both camps, and this was indeed the whole point of Brimley Johnson's label, 'New Realism'. In 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown' Woolf even agrees with Bennett that characters are vital components of a novel, though she contends that the characters that are real to her are radically different from those which Bennett considers convincing (CE,1:319). But Woolf seems to move further and further away from realism, sociological or 'New', and to wish fiction to become 'poetry', no longer representing reality but rather presenting or constructing reality. Writing about the major modernist authors, David Lodge notes 'a general tendency to develop...from a metonymic (realistic) to a metaphoric (symbolist or mythopoeic) representation of experience. Virginia Woolf exemplifies this tendency very clearly'.<sup>7</sup> Woolf's aesthetic declarations in her various 'manifestos' and in her actual literary practice (starting with Jacob's Room and culminating in The Waves) exemplify her pursuit of a symbolist modernism, the aim of which is to create meaningful order and pattern by imposing artistic form on the supposed chaos of the phenomenal world (though aspiration is one thing and actual achievement another). While



thus establishing her avant-garde literary identity, Virginia Woolf represses an incipient feminism that had, however, been testified to by the concern of both her earliest novels, Voyage Out and Night and Day, with women's problems, as also by the short story 'A Society' which may be seen as a prototype of both A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas. In this light it is interesting that Woolf published her first major feminist essay 'Women and Fiction' and its extended, book-length version, A Room of One's Own in 1929, when her fame was highest after the successive publication of Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse and Orlando, and when she was contemplating a play-poem, The Waves, the final embodiment of her symbolist ideal.

A Room of One's Own (and 'Women and Fiction') is a rewriting of 'Modern Fiction', presenting what was once a generation difference in terms of gender difference. Earlier, Woolf expressed the dissatisfaction of younger writers with literary conventions that denature their own vision. Now she explicitly identifies 'the arbiters of that convention' as men:

as they have established an order of values in life, so too, since fiction is largely based on life, these values prevail there also to a very great extent.

It is probable, however, that both in life and in art the values of a woman are not the values of a man. Thus, when a woman comes to write a novel, she will find that she is perpetually wishing to alter the established values - to make serious what appear insignificant to a man, and trivial what is to him important. (CE, 2:145-6)

But 'in the midst of that purely patriarchal society' (RO, 112) the critic of the opposite (male) sex will see in this attempt to alter the current scale of values 'not merely a difference of view, but a view that is weak, or trivial, or sentimental, because it differs from his own' (CE, 2:146). A further difficulty which women writers are faced with because of this difference is the inadequacy of the language of novelistic texture as well as narrative structure. Woolf advocates that the woman writer alter and adapt the current 'man's sentence', which is

'unsuited for a woman's use' (RO, 115), 'until she writes one that takes the natural shape of her thought without crushing or distorting it'. (CE, 2:145) At the level of macrostructure, women need to reshape the present literary form which 'has been made by men out of their own needs for their uses' and to provide 'some new vehicle' (RO, 116).

Yet even in her earlier writings, Woolf begins to attribute the 'Georgian' literary revolt to the difference and the value of the specifically female writer. For already in 1918 she noted in a review of Brimley Johnson's The Women Novelists that from the difference of view between man and woman 'spring not only marked differences of plot and incident, but infinite differences in selection, method and style' (CW, 27). In the review of The Tunnel (1919), Woolf points to Richardson's 'genuine conviction of the discrepancy between what she has to say and the form provided by tradition for her to say it in' (CW, 120), and Richardson herself had explicitly argued that the discrepancy derives from sexual difference: 'a woman is at a disadvantage -because they speak different languages...She must...stammeringly, speak his'.<sup>8</sup> Woolf also points to this discrepancy, quoting Miriam Henderson's objection to writing a book with 'mannish cleverness', becoming 'like a man' (CW, 120). 'The spasmodic, the obscure, the fragmentary' attempt of the modernists to break down the 'sleek, smooth novels', the 'portentous and ridiculous biographies' of the older generation (CE, 1:336-337) - this modernist revolt is based on 'the difference of view, the difference of standard' (CE, 1:204) as a woman which, as Woolf wrote in 1919, George Eliot refused to renounce. The modernist revolt attempted to rupture both the oppressive ideology of sameness held in place by Victorian patriarchy and the complacent superficiality of the Edwardians who failed to question it; it represented the assertion of a radical alternative to what contemporary feminists regard as a phallogentric society and culture. For women this conflict with Victorian and Edwardian

conventions is naturally the crucial issue for their own sex, though the conflict was actually shared by both men and women. For Woolf, both the feminist aesthetic and modernist aesthetic converge, at least initially, in this attempt to break the dominance of phallogentrism.

But around 1920, Woolf predominantly urges only the modernist case in her aesthetic manifestos, as if she represses the feminist version, 'resist(ing) the temptation to anger' (CE,2:144), for as she repeatedly contends, self-consciousness of one's sex, and the bitterness, fear, protest, and preaching which necessarily spring from it cannot but denature one's writing. Not that she was by any means free of anger. The publication in 1920 of Arnold Bennett's Our Women and its attendant publicity led Woolf to consider 'making up a paper upon Women, as a counterblast to Mr. Bennett's adverse views' (WD, 28-29). This paper has not survived, if it was ever begun, but her indignation was finally discharged through a correspondence with the columnist 'Affable Hawk' of the New Statesman (Desmond MacCarthy) who discussed Bennett's book and endorsed its argument, that 'intellectually and creatively man is the superior of woman', and 'no amount of education and liberty of action will sensibly alter' that fact. In a letter headed 'The Intellectual Status of Women' on 9th October, 1920, and in a reply to the further response of MacCarthy, Woolf refutes this essentialist argument and protests that the lack of artistic and intellectual achievement by women is culturally determined, the result of 'some external restraint upon their powers'. Woolf's contention foreshadows her arguments in A Room of One's Own. Genius is not a singular, solitary birth; it requires a long tradition and favourable external conditions (education, freedom of action). Such is Woolf's version of T.S. Eliot's 'Tradition and the Individual Talent': 'you will not get a big Newton until you have produced a considerable number of lesser Newtons'. She finally demands that women 'should differ from men without fear and express their difference openly',<sup>9</sup> and such statements as those of Bennett and

MacCarthy impede this possibility. It is thus likely that Bennett's anti-feminism may have given a sharper edge to Woolf's hostility to his literary values.

Woolf expressed difference openly, however, not as the difference of a woman writer but as that of a new generation. The temptation to anger, the pressure of fear, were still too great; Woolf's own literary position was still too insecure and vulnerable for her to assert woman's difference and be treated seriously in literary debate.<sup>10</sup> Even when, in 1929, she can to a certain extent express her feminist protest openly, her motto remains 'to resist the temptation to anger'. She accordingly adopts a strategy of humour and satire, defending herself with 'fiction' and 'lies' rather than 'facts' and 'truths' (RO, 7). Facts are completely ruled by men, there are no facts left for women; Shakespeare's sister can only be retrieved in fiction, for she is a completely 'lost' existence in history. Galsworthy, who was already a victim in 'Modern Fiction', is taken up in A Room of One's Own and his works are criticized from a woman's point of view for their pure maleness. 'Do what she will a woman cannot find in them that fountain of perpetual life which the critics assure her is there. It is not only that they celebrate male virtues, enforce male values and describe the world of men; it is that the emotion with which these books are permeated is to a woman incomprehensible' (RO, 153).<sup>11</sup>

Thus if her literary adversaries from the early 1920's are now redefined as masculinist, Woolf also distances herself from her former allies who are now seen as representatives of the dominant male culture. In 'The Leaning Tower', published in 1940, Woolf described the writers whose best books were written between 1910 and 1925 as tower-dwellers. The 'representative names' that she lists include E.M. Forster, Lytton Strachey, T.S. Eliot, Aldous Huxley. All these writers (D.H. Lawrence is the major exception) have been raised 'above the mass of people', they



stand 'upon a tower raised above the rest of us; a tower built first on his parents' station' - 'that is their middle-class birth', on his parents' 'gold - that is their expensive education' at the public schools and ancient universities (CE,2:168-169). This is true, she points out, of all the nineteenth-century writers and of the groups which wrote between 1925 and 1939. But 'the tower of this last generation is precarious, leaning, about to topple down. If Woolf situates herself in 'the mass of people', 'the rest of us', she clearly views the fact of her class birth as a less radical determinant than her exclusion from the educational process which, she emphasizes, played the crucial part in forming these writers' literary outlook. Dissociating herself from previous allies like Forster and Strachey, who are now branded as tower-dwellers, she writes: 'are we not commoners, outsiders?' (CE,2:181). Alluding to a resonant image from A Room of One's Own, where the heroine upsets a Beadle by trespassing on the turf of an Oxbridge college, she recommends trespass, transgression: 'Let us trespass at once. Literature is no one's private ground; literature is common ground...Let us trespass freely and fearlessly and find our own way for ourselves' (CE,2:181). She looks eagerly forward to the next, post-war generation, when all towers will have disappeared, thus affording the possibility of a literature of commoners, outsiders.

It is perhaps more than mere accident that Woolf symbolized 'the spirit we live by, life itself' (CE, 1:337), the vision which a novelist must capture, by 'Mrs. Brown' - an insignificant, small, elderly woman. It is the voice of this woman, who is 'protesting that she was different' (CE, 1:333), that had been silenced or ignored in the novels of Bennett, Galsworthy, and Wells: 'They have looked...at factories, at Utopias, even at the decoration and upholstery of the carriage; but never at her' (330). Discussing a passage from Arnold Bennett's Hilda Lessways, Woolf complains: 'But we cannot hear her mother's voice, or Hilda's voice' (330). To make the woman's voice heard, one might be led 'to destroy the

very foundation and rules of literary society...Grammar is violated; syntax disintegrated'(334). In A Room of One's Own Woolf contends that 'for the whole of that extremely complex force of femininity' to be expressed, 'the resources of the English language would be much put to the stretch, and whole flights of words would need to wing their way illegitimately into existence' (RO, 131 - emphasis added). Having declared that 'the Edwardian tools are the wrong ones for us to use' (CE, 1:332), her own untiring experiments and innovation in the method and forms of fiction can be seen as the pursuit of the woman's voice, altering and adapting the current novelistic texture and structure 'until she writes [a sentence] that takes the natural shape of her thought without crushing or distorting it' (CE, 2:145). For, she writes in 1920, this is 'a task that must be accomplished before there is freedom or achievement', referring to the frustration of Bathsheba in Far from the Madding Crowd, who says that she has 'the feelings of a woman', but only 'the language of men'.<sup>12</sup>

For Woolf, then, aesthetic innovation and feminist conviction are deeply interlinked, and her notion of 'androgyny', the theoretical implications of which I shall now consider, mediates between the two, being both a formal principle and a substantive theory in its own right. Inasmuch as Woolf's feminism is underemphasized, though still latently present, in her early Modernist manifestos, her concept of androgyny can be seen as an attempt to theorize, after the fact, vital new insights to which she had already broken through in literary practice.

'Women are apt to differ' (CW, 26); 'they should differ from men without fear and express their difference openly'.<sup>13</sup> In these terms Woolf praises Dorothy Richardson's Revolving Lights; she applauds its sentence as 'the psychological sentence of the feminine gender' and her description of it might well be applied to her own writing: 'of a more elastic fibre than the old, capable of stretching to the extreme, of

suspending the frailest particles, of enveloping the vaguest shapes'. 'It is a woman's sentence, but only in the sense that it is used to describe a woman's mind by a writer who is neither proud nor afraid of anything that she may discover in the psychology of her sex' (CW, 124-125). However, while she advocates a specifically female sentence, Woolf also warns that 'it is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex. It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple' (RO, 156-157). She here again stresses the literary dangers of selfconsciousness. 'It is fatal for a woman...to speak consciously as a woman' (RO, 157). She therefore defines the ideal state of the creative mind as 'androgynous' (RO, 148): 'one must be woman-manly or man-womanly' (RO, 157). The logic which holds together these two seemingly contradictory arguments - a writer must be androgynous, sexually unselfconscious; a woman writer must find or forge the woman's sentence - is the principle of 'difference' as opposed to the logic of identity. The forgetting of one's sex does not erase difference, which necessarily derives from one's sex, for 'that curious sexual quality...comes only when sex is unconscious of itself' (RO, 140). And after all the concept of androgyny is possible only on the basis of the existence of two distinct genders. Against an Enlightenment universalism which, by defining humanity as disembodied Reason, would reduce sexual difference to a merely phenomenal form, Woolf argues: 'if two sexes are quite inadequate, considering the vastness and variety of the world, how should we manage with one only? Ought not education to bring out and fortify the differences rather than the similarities? For we have too much likeness as it is' (RO, 132). Androgyny is the rejection of sameness; it aims to cultivate difference on an individual level, in the teeth of a cultural impulse to reduce the two sexes into something that is neither.

Yet as Stephen Heath notes in The Sexual Fix, this argument is a double-edged weapon: optimally 'it can function...as the beginning of an alternative representation, as an insistence against the one position,



the fixed sexual order, man and woman', but on the other hand, 'it can return constantly as a confirmation of that fixity, a strategy in which differences...are neutralized into the given systems of identity, the two halves - masculine and feminine - adding up to the same old one'. Bisexuality can thus become a theoretical and ideological trap, as happens, according to Heath, in the cases of Freud and D.H. Lawrence. For them 'the basis of that polarity [man/woman]...is the man, the phallus, the phallic organization of the sexual'. So bisexuality, as plurality opened up in the individual, is in fact 'reduced in the very beginning...to the system of the one-phallic-identity'.<sup>14</sup>

If 'it is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple', 'fatal' is no mere figure of speech, since writing founded on such monolithic positions 'is doomed to death', 'it ceases to be fertilised' (RO, 157), 'falls plump to the ground - dead' (153). Meaning, it is here implied, can be produced only in the play of difference. The French theorist Julia Kristeva makes a similar point when she writes of 'sexual difference, not as a fixed opposition ("man"/"woman"), but as a process of differentiation' to which 'the truly great "literary" achievements bear witness'. She continues: 'All speaking subjects have within themselves a certain bisexuality which is precisely the possibility to explore all the sources of signification, that which posits a meaning as well as that which multiplies, pulverizes, and finally revives it'.<sup>15</sup> Woolf does, to be sure, refer to 'the unity of the mind', 'a natural fusion' (RO, 146-147), but this is not a single unitary state, but a wholeness which is composed of heterogeneity, for the mind, for Woolf, 'seems to have no single state of being...It can think back through its fathers or through its mothers' (RO, 146). The homogeneous unity of the mind is only a fiction maintainable by 'repression' (RO, 147). Mary Jacobus rightly interprets Woolf's androgyny as 'a simultaneous enactment of desire and repression by which the split is closed with an essentially Utopian



vision of undivided consciousness. The repressive male/female opposition which "interferes with the unity of the mind" gives way to a mind paradoxically conceived of not as one, but as heterogeneous, open to the play of difference'.<sup>16</sup> The rejection of homogeneity and the realization of this paradoxically heterogeneous harmony is Woolf's aim in elaborating the Utopian concept of androgyny. It is not, at any rate, a Hegelian Aufhebung of opposed terms.

The assertion of the specificity of the feminine and the attempt to inscribe that specificity in language becomes important in this context of the defence of difference against the existing order of discourse and culture, which is that of the sameness organized around a single standard, the man, or, in psychoanalytic terms, the phallus. In the male text Woolf finds the 'straight dark bar..."I"' casting a dominating phallic shadow across the page and obliterating all else, 'a tree' or 'a woman', into mist and vapour (RO, 150). Hence Woolf explains the 'I' of her own discourse as 'only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being', any 'Mary' or many 'Marys' (RO, 8). It is in this sense that Woolf can, without self-contradiction, urge the need for a specifically female sentence at the same time as she advocates an ideal of androgyny for the writer's mind. Woman is privileged (or rather forced) to attain an androgynous position and to call into question, to reveal the fictionality of, the dominant male ideology of the same in order to deconstruct the masculine discourse. For woman is situated at once outside and inside in relation to the dominant order. In spite of her difference she, too, is necessarily submitted to phallocentricity in order to have access to what Lacan terms the symbolic, to language and culture. The woman's mind 'can think back through its fathers or through its mothers', and she 'is often surprised by a sudden splitting off of consciousness...when from being the natural inheritor of that civilisation, she becomes, on the contrary, outside of it, alien and critical. Clearly the mind is always altering its focus, and bringing

the world into different perspectives' (RO, 146). Woman may well be said to be necessarily androgynous because of this internal 'split' in her consciousness. Woolf's position is close to that of the French feminist theorist Hélène Cixous, who also defines woman's position as 'neither outside nor in' and privileged for its 'bisexuality': 'Now it happens that at present, for historico-cultural reasons, it is women who are opening up to and benefiting from this vatic bisexuality which doesn't annul differences but stirs them up, pursues them, increases their number. In a certain way, "woman is bisexual": man...being poised to keep glorious phallic monosexuality in view'.<sup>17</sup>

What, then, is this difference between men and women? In particular what is a feminine writing? Stephen Heath points out the dangers of the argument in favour of 'difference', which can, with alarming ease, merge into familiar reactionary positions:

a tourniquet operates in which the real necessity to claim difference binds back, and precisely from the difference claimed, into the renewal of the same, a reflection of the place assigned, assigned as difference. Patriarchy, men in its order, has never said anything but that women are - the woman is - different: they are not men, the difference maintained supports the status quo, the difference derived, derived ideologically, from nature, the appeal to the biological, 'undeniable'.<sup>18</sup>

It is therefore crucial to break away from any such essentialist definition of difference, which 'is always itself a form of social representation, within a particular structure of assumption and argument'.<sup>19</sup> Woolf takes scrupulous care not to fall into essentialism. At the beginning of A Room of One's Own, she wards off the problem: 'I have shirked the duty of coming to a conclusion upon' the question of 'the true nature of women' (RO, 6). In a speech for the National Society for Women's Service she argues: 'But what is 'herself'?...what is a woman? I assure you, I don't know; I do not believe that you know; I do not believe that anybody can know until she has expressed herself in all



the arts and professions open to human skill'.<sup>20</sup> Woman is a project, not a given; femininity is a matter of representation, a historical and cultural construction, not an eternal essence which could be always referred to outside any socio-historical context. Women are so radically various (women's 'rooms differ so completely' (RO, 131)) that all Woolf can say she has discovered is that 'a woman...is not a man'.<sup>21</sup> Discussing Brimley Johnson's book, The Women Novelists, Woolf agrees with him that 'a woman's writing is always feminine', and continues: 'the only difficulty lies in defining what we mean by feminine. He shows his wisdom not only by advancing a great many suggestions, but also by accepting the fact...that women are apt to differ'. The attempt at definition makes a circular argument round the term 'difference', since it cannot make any reference outside it; thus feminine difference is defined only by the tautology of 'difference'. 'The essential difference' between a novel written by a man and a novel by a woman 'lies in the fact...that each sex describes itself' rather than in 'the obvious and enormous difference of experience' (CW, 26). Here again the difference does not get referred back to experience outside representation, but rather depends, in circular fashion, on the very representation of the difference itself. The crucial task is to free the feminine from the essentialist 'difference', which is itself the construction of a representation within and by a particular ideology, and to understand it as a problem produced in representation.

In the light of this, Elaine Showalter's well-known critique of Woolf's founding of an aesthetic upon the ideal of androgyny should itself be critically reconsidered. In A Literature of their Own Showalter argues that Woolf's androgyny 'represents an escape from the confrontation with femaleness or maleness', and that her famous definition of life as 'a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope' is 'another metaphor of uterine withdrawal and containment'. The false transcendence of 'sexual identity', or in Showalter's phrase, 'the flight

into androgyny' amounts to 'evasions of reality' and of 'the female experience', and this is presumed to result in Woolf's 'progressive technical inability to accommodate the facts and crises of day-to-day experience, even when she wanted to do so'.<sup>22</sup> What is posited in Showalter's stress on 'confrontation', 'sexual identity' or 'experience' is what we might term a Lukácsian concept of a unified autonomous subject which is the sole agent of its own development in confrontation with the environment. But, as structuralism has argued, if the human subject is born into a preexisting network of sign-systems and is constituted in and by them, then the individual's 'identity', either social or sexual, cannot be taken as a self-evident starting point; nor is there a simple confrontation of the human subject and the world; nor are we justified in a naive belief in authentic experience, which is always already implicated in the surrounding structures and produced by them. Experience never comes into being without representation; there is no immediate experience or pure facts, as Woolf was well aware in A Room of One's Own, where she appeals to the order of 'fiction' rather than 'facts', to 'lies' rather than 'truth' in her attempt to construct a female perspective. Showalter's term 'confrontation' (in this case of woman and man, woman and a patriarchal, phallogentric society) offers as indubitable starting point a subject-object polarity that is, in fact, already reified and abstract. The feminist text must call into question the very identities which support this particular pattern of binary opposition. In this context, the concept of androgyny becomes radical, opening up the fixed unity into a multiplicity, joy, play of heterogeneity, a fertile difference.

In her account of subjectivity and 'self', Showalter is very near to George Lukács's famous denunciations of modernist literature, as is indicated by her referring to Lukács's formulation in her critique of Woolf's aesthetics: the ethic of a novelist, she notes, becomes an



aesthetic problem in his/her writing. In The Meaning of Contemporary Realism Lukács notoriously criticizes modernist literature, defining its characteristics as an 'attenuation of reality and dissolution of personality': 'Man is reduced to a sequence of unrelated experiential fragments'. He sees this 'modernist schizophrenia'<sup>23</sup> as leading to passive impotence in the face of the human impasse brought about by capitalist industrialization, and for Showalter, analogously, Woolf's description of (in the critic's phrase) 'consciousness as passive receptivity' is, in one sense, 'an extension of her view of women's female social role: receptivity to the point of self-destruction'.<sup>24</sup> The human being is deprived of his or her active subjectivity, his or her own role as agent of change in dialectical relationship with world history. Though Lukács does not specifically mention Virginia Woolf in his critical account of modernist literature, her work might well be one of the targets of his attack, figuring as a typical example of the introverted withdrawal from reality which results in the dissolution of the self, of the characteristic cul-de-sac of subjectivism into which modernism has driven itself.

The psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan, influenced as it has been by structuralism, offers a radically new view of the problem of subjectivity, which puts into question the Lukácsian notion of an autonomous, coherently unified self confronting the outer world. For Lacan there is no natural, unitary self, no Cogito. His notion of the 'mirror-stage', maintains that the baby, lacking the ability to coordinate movements of the body and thus experiencing fragmentation, comes to discover the 'self' by a mirror-like identification with the image of another. Only by this misrecognition of itself as a whole in identification with the image of the other can the child constitute the self. This one-to-one identification, which subordinates the child to its image, to its mother, to others, is alienating, and this fundamental gap opened between the subject and its own self, in which, indeed, the

infant discovers his self, can never be bridged. Questioning the integrity of the 'I', Lacan reveals that the fragmentation of the self which Lukács interprets as the pathology of modernism is a universal fact of the human subject. Misrecognition (méconnaissance) constitutes the ego; autonomy is illusion, fiction. The self, constituted in relation to the other, is thoroughly permeated by the other in its very formation.

If the assumption of the autonomous subject and fixed identity is problematized by structuralism and psychoanalysis, then 'reality', the very ground for Lukács's realist aesthetics, has also been put into question. The work of semioticians like Roland Barthes maintains that the 'reality' to which 'realism' appeals is an ideological construction, as Virginia Woolf had herself argued in 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown': 'If you say to the public with sufficient conviction: "All women have tails, and all men humps," it will actually learn to see women with tails and men with humps' (CE, 1:332). The formal characteristics of the realist novel - narrativity, plot, character - are also radically put into question, in both semiotic theory and modernist literary practice. Woolf 'insubstantiates' reality 'wilfully' (WD, 57) and dismisses the criticism that she cannot create characters: 'it's only the old argument that character is dissipated into shreds now; the old post-Dostoevsky argument' (WD, 57).

Gillian Beer has pointed out the neglect of Woolf's 'narrative politics' in Elaine Showalter's critique. Against Showalter's impatient claim that Woolf withdraws from 'the facts and crises of day-to-day experience', Beer argues: 'If Virginia Woolf moves away from facts and crises it is because she denies the claim of such ordering to be all-inclusive'.<sup>25</sup> Within the arena of feminist criticism, a polemic analogous to the realism-modernism debate in Marxism (Lukács versus, say, Brecht) is thus fought out. Either one demands that the novel possess a new realist content, so that a new consciousness and a will to



transformation may arise; or one questions and rejects the very form of realism as no longer adequate, as simply an impediment. I want to argue that the two trends - feminist aesthetic and modernist aesthetic - are, at least in Woolf's case, the two faces of a single project. Since, for Woolf, modernism and feminism constitute a single awareness and concern, her declaration of an urgent need for new fictional modes and languages is a protest against Lacan's symbolic order. According to Lacan, this order of discursive and symbolic action operates with the phallus as the privileged signifier. It fixes difference along the axis of having or not having the phallus, and thus refers to a condition outside itself which makes significance possible. This symbolic order, to which the human being has to submit in order to become a speaking subject, is acquired as the child abandons the dyadic, Imaginary mother-child relationship through the acceptance of a third term, the Name-of-the-Father. This is accomplished through the resolution of the castration complex, in which the child confronts the existence of the phallus and the possibility of losing it and accepts the father's 'no' to its desire for the mother's body.<sup>26</sup> Thus the symbolic order, the whole realm of discursive and symbolic action, is constructed with the phallus as its privileged signifier, is phallogentric, patriarchal. Any alternative form or alternative language will then have to be non-phallogentric.

The convergence of modernism and feminism might be expressed in Lacanian terms. Modernism might then be seen as an attempt to reintroduce the Imaginary, which has had to be repressed and transformed, into a symbolic order which is identified with the repressive order of Victorianism by modern writers. The Imaginary is the realm of the immediate, dual relationship of child and mother in the pre-Oedipal phase; it precedes the emergence of self, and contains no distinction of subject and object. But the child has to emerge from its fusion with the maternal body through the Name-of-the-Father into a mediate relationship, i.e., the symbolic. In this theoretical scheme, the revolt of the

Imaginary is an attempt to retrieve the maternal which has been repressed by the Law of the Father and its limited definitions of selfhood. Such a scheme has been outlined by Hélène Cixous, one of the French feminists who criticize the privileged place accorded the phallus in Lacanian accounts of language and sexual difference, as well as his valorization of the symbolic. She defends a mode of writing that inscribes the feminine: 'Writing in the feminine is passing on what is cut out by the Symbolic, the voice of the mother, passing on what is most archaic. The most archaic force that touches a body is one that enters by the ear and reaches the most intimate point'.<sup>27</sup> In Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision, Nancy Topping Bazin explains Woolf's concept of reality by her 'manic-depressive' psychology. Partly because Woolf associates mania with her mother and depression with her father, Bazin argues that the terms manic/depressive merge into the opposition between feminine and masculine; Woolf's aim would then be to achieve a balance between these two opposite forces, symbolized as the 'androgynous mind'. But Bazin's <sup>a</sup>paradigm of depressive (father)/manic (mother) should, perhaps, be interpreted as a universal problem for the human subject which has to be produced in the confrontation of the Imaginary with the symbolic, rather than as Woolf's personal, familial tragedy, and should thus be considered in the wider context of modernism and feminism. Similarly, the relationship between these two terms should not be seen as confined to female writers in general, or Woolf in particular, for, as Stephen Heath has suggested, 'modern writing has been precisely bound up with the question of female language, feminine discourse'. For in modern writing, with its dislocations of syntax, its displacement of positions, its disruption of any one identity into mobility, the question of feminine discourse emerges 'as a challenge to the fixity of identity, as a challenge to the "male" and "female" which are the very terms - the places - of that identity, as a challenge to the very principle of sexual



identity, the whole fix of "sexuality".<sup>28</sup>

If we understand feminine writing as an attempt to break the dominance of male positions and to inscribe, instead, positions against or alternative to those of the dominant male-centred order, then the possibility of feminine writing does not exclusively correspond to the biological gender of the writer. From the feminist perspective, however, feminine writing cannot perhaps be finally separated from a specifically feminine content, from its inscription by a biological woman. Despite her claim that it is fatal to write thinking of one's sex, Woolf praises the structure of the Richardsonian sentence as 'a woman's sentence' 'only in the sense that it is used to describe a woman's mind' by a woman writer 'neither proud nor afraid of...the psychology of her sex' (CW, 124-125). Male writers may have used a similar sentence, 'but there is a difference', Woolf argues: 'Miss Richardson has fashioned her sentence consciously' in order to 'descend to the depths and investigate the crannies of Miriam Henderson's consciousness'.<sup>29</sup> In any attempt to adumbrate the qualities of a feminine discourse, one tends, perhaps ineluctably, to appeal to an analogy with women's physical characteristics, bodily experiences, sexual behaviour or even with conventional images of 'femaleness' offered by the existing order. Woolf talks about a need for the book 'to be adapted to the body' (RO, 117), employs terms like 'elastic', 'frailest', 'vaguest', 'enveloping' in her description of Richardson's 'sentence of the feminine gender' (CW, 124). May Sinclair notes interminability as a characteristic of Richardson's sentence;<sup>30</sup> Gillian Beer remarks Woolf's deliberate 'avoidance of narrative climax', 'arousal without climax' in The Waves. The French feminist theorists who have done most to develop the concept of feminine writing also refer to its 'liquid flow', 'endlessness' or a writing 'in white ink [milk]'.<sup>31</sup> Yet there is once again a danger that this writing will end up merely reproducing the 'embedded assumptions about male and female characters', for Gillian Beer shrewdly notes that Arnold Bennett's

description of George Eliot's writing as 'feminine' - 'too rank to have any enduring vitality', 'feminine in its lack of restraint, its wordiness, and the utter absence of feeling for form that characterises it' - coincides precisely with recent feminists' description of feminine language, except that the value judgements are reversed.<sup>32</sup> The valorization of the 'feminine' qualities is meaningful precisely as a strategy of reversal, as a challenge to conventional norms of writing.

Thus recent French writers have attempted to address the problem of feminine language at a deeper, more structural level than that feminine language which feminists have always attacked as the very locus of sexism on the socio-linguistic level. Working in the ambit of post-structuralism and neo-Freudian psychoanalysis (whether for or against Lacan), these writers construe language, the symbolic order, representation itself as made possible by the repression of 'woman'. Femininity and representation are, on this showing, the question which psychoanalysis has failed to answer. Both Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis can only define woman as non-man, as absence, lack, excess, the blind spot. If these feminist writers start from psychoanalysis, they simultaneously attempt to go beyond it and to deconstruct any binary opposition of presence/absence organized around the phallus as the Signifier, as well as all the other dual oppositions ('hierarchized opposition' in Cixous's phrase) which follow from this: full presence-masculine-active-positive-coherent (superior); absence-feminine-passive-negative-incoherent (inferior). They offer a theoretical understanding of femininity as the term which has been repressed into marginality and silence by the order of representation, this constituting the very condition for the functioning of the symbolic order. Exposing the logocentrism of Western culture as patriarchal in its very formation, they radically question the whole phallogentric tradition of the West, and advocate feminine writing as the locus where that repressed term - woman's desire (jouissance,



la mère qui jouit) -speaks, as voicing this muted 'Other'.

The difficulty is, then, how this feminine language is possible, if the repression of the feminine is the very condition of the human subject's speech; or how the refusal of language, of the symbolic order and phallogentricity, is possible without a collapse into silence, marginality, or even psychosis. Julia Kristeva's theory of the subject (subject in process/on trial) and of poetic language offers, precisely, a new understanding of the dynamics of the repressed term - the maternal or the pre-Oedipal - in its relations to the repressive, and helps to resolve the difficulty.

Kristeva calls our attention to what she calls signifiance - 'the heterogeneous practice', 'unlimited and unbound generating process', 'a structuring and de-structuring practice' performed in the signifying practices of art and literature.<sup>33</sup> According to Kristeva, the signifying process comprises two modalities: 'semiotic' and 'symbolic'. Since for her the dialectic between these two modalities constitutes the subject, she offers a new concept of subjectivity - the subject in process/on trial (sujet en procès) as opposed to the traditional concept of the unitary subject. Like Lacan's symbolic order, the Kristevan symbolic is founded on a repression, on the splitting of the subject into conscious and unconscious, signifier and signified; it is the realm of signification, discourse, law, the sum and locus of human society. The second modality of signifying process, the semiotic, however, 'logically and chronologically precedes the establishment of the symbolic and its subject' (RPL, 41). 'The semiotic is articulated by flow and marks: fasciation, energy transfers, the cutting up of the corporeal and social continuum as well as that of signifying material' (41), the establishment of a 'distinctiveness' that is ordered in what Kristeva terms the 'chora'. This chora is 'a non-expressive totality formed by the drives and their stresses in a motility' (25). Discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as

such, and gradually, under the constraints of biological growth and social or familial structures, they are provisionally fixed into the different semiotic materials - sound, movement, colour, shape. The chora is 'analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm', 'has no thesis and no position' (26). Without unity or identity, this rhythmic space is nevertheless subject to 'a regulating process' different from that of the symbolic law, and thus constitutes a basis for signification. We can imagine the semiotic chora 'in the cry, the sounds, the gesture of the baby'. In adult discourse, 'the semiotic functions as rhythm, prosody, word game, the no-sense of sense, laughter'.<sup>34</sup> Thus the semiotic is distinguished from signification, which is 'a realm of positions'.

Positionality, by which signification becomes possible, requires the identification of the subject and its distinction from objects; the subject must separate from and through his image, from and through his objects. Kristeva calls this 'break' which produces the positing of signification, the 'thetic phase' (RPL, 43). This thetic subject governs the whole tradition of Occidental thought and is the basis of its rationalism, and Kristeva sees its clearest expression in the 'transcendental ego' of Husserl:

The thetic permits the constitution of the symbolic with its vertical stratification (referent, signified, signifier) and all the subsequent modalities of logico-semantic articulation. The thetic originates in the 'mirror stage' and is completed, through the phallic stage, by the reactivation of the Oedipus complex in puberty; no signifying practice can be without it. Though absolutely necessary, the thetic is not exclusive: the semiotic, which also precedes it, constantly tears it open, and this transgression brings about all the various transformations of the signifying practice that are called 'creation'. (RPL, 62)

The crux of Kristeva's theory is the dialectic of these two heterogeneous realms - semiotic and symbolic - which operate in signifying practice reciprocally and inseparably. The thetic phase is 'the precondition for such a heterogeneity' (63), an absolute necessity which 'marks a



threshold between the semiotic and the symbolic' (48).

Among signifying practices, poetry is the special focus of Kristeva's work, since it is situated directly over the schism between the thetic and semiotic practices and impulses. Poetic language, she argues, 'reintroduces through the symbolic that which works on, moves through, and threatens it' - the semiotic (81). Kristeva champions avant-garde texts (Artaud, Mallarmé, Lautrémont, Joyce) which demonstrate a destruction of the unified thetic subject through the articulation of the semiotic. Such texts, shattering positionality, unleash a profound force of rupture or 'negativity' that might, just possibly, constitute a terrain where a new kind of subject and discourse might be engendered. Without transforming the subject, Kristeva argues, there will be no revolution on the socio-symbolic level either. Only 'the production of a different kind of subject' can bring about 'new social relations' (105). She champions the works of the avant-garde modernists as potentially revolutionary, as playing a role in the transformation or subversion of capitalism.

Even while she valorizes the irruption of the semiotic, however, Kristeva also emphasizes the necessity of the thetic, stressing that the breach of the symbolic by the semiotic in poetic practice is necessarily relative. A text requires 'a completion', 'a kind of totalization of semiotic mobility' in order to hold together as a text: 'This completion constitutes a synthesis that requires the thesis of language in order to come about, and the semiotic pulverizes it only to make it a new device' (RPL, 51). This is what distinguishes a text as signifying practice from neurotic or psychotic discourse. After all, no text can be altogether devoid of meaning or signification; the 'valorizations of presymbolic semiotic stases, not only require the ensured maintenance of this signification, but also serve signification, even when they dislocate it' (65).

What remains problematic in Kristeva is the link between this poetic

destruction of masculine rationality, and a specifically political practice, feminist or socialist. Allon White remarks of her work:

The space between the formal textual innovations which she describes and the radical political practice (feminism) to which she subscribes is never satisfactorily filled, since the destruction of syntactic order and pronominal stability in a poetic discourse, even when it can be appropriated for political use is, always and only, a negative politics, an evanescent disruption, incapable of identifying its own political agent (masculine or feminine).

For White, then, Kristeva's 'psycho-anarchic aesthetics' replaces 'a repressive, phallogentric logos' by a 'politically impotent', 'drifting, dispersed' subject, which will be dangerously vulnerable to the force of social history.<sup>35</sup> Yet, on the other hand, Kristeva is criticized by other feminists for her valorization of the symbolic as a necessary resource, at least temporarily, though it has, ultimately, to be rejected again. The fact that these criticisms of Kristeva come from both sides shows that they abstractly single out what is, in her theory itself, a necessary dialectic between anarchic destruction and repressive mastering of these desires and impulses, neither of which must be reduced to the other.

Kristeva has most powerfully made the case for a non-essentialist yet feminine writing, taking to task her coevals who are somewhat ambivalent on this point. Irigaray's use of woman's autoeroticism, her sexual organs being composed of 'two lips which embrace continually', provides a series of bodily metaphors that come perilously close to biological essentialism. Cixous also maintains woman's closeness to the body, defends the characteristics of the writing of women who speak with the body, and celebrates the 'gestation drive', yet, in the face of this biologicistic tendency, she names James Joyce and Jean Genêt together with Colette and Marguerite Duras as exceptional writers who successfully articulate a feminine discourse.<sup>36</sup> Kristeva distrusts a 'romantic' belief in feminine identity and sees such literary practices as the mere



inverse of phallocratism, which, for all their revolutionary rhetoric, only reinstate the site of women's oppression and confinement. For Kristeva, femininity is a position, not an essence, an archaic phase of experience that remains available as a possibility rather than a substantive identity given once and for all: 'In "woman", I see something that cannot be represented, something that is not said, something above and beyond nomenclatures and ideologies. There are certain "men" who are familiar with this phenomenon; it is what some modern texts never stop signifying'.<sup>37</sup> The feminine (or rather the maternal body), is situated in the semiotic, the pre-Oedipal phase, but actual women must submit to the symbolic in order to constitute themselves as speaking human subjects. Unlike the son, the daughter is of the same sex as the mother and thus has a stronger identification with the mother's body and is less inhibited towards the desire for her body. Her separation from the maternal body is accordingly imperfect, and she remains in a more intimate relation with the semiotic level of signification; women live at the borderline, in the margin of the symbolic. Situated between nature and culture, chaos and order, woman is neither outside nor inside; she is necessarily, in Woolf's term, 'androgynous'. Woolf, too, talks of the 'split' in the woman's consciousness, which 'can think back through its fathers or through its mothers' (RO, 146), and defines women as 'trespassers' who emerge from the margin to which they are allocated, transgressing the boundaries that delimit inside from outside. Woolf adds that: 'Poetry ought to have a mother as well as a father (RO, 155); a great literary mind has to be 'androgynous'. Thus Woolf's argument bears an affinity to Kristeva's theory of poetic language: poetry is poised over the tension between the thetic and the semiotic practices, and in poetic language the semiotic mode of signification articulates ruptures, to a greater or lesser degree in the symbolic order.

Woolf is, indeed, one of the few women writers occasionally

mentioned by Kristeva, who is notoriously dismissive of the works of women. She deals with Woolf briefly in one short chapter of About Chinese Women, and also in 'Oscillation between power and denial', in which Woolf's writing is mentioned as an example of a woman's discourse in which language is 'seen from a foreign land', 'from the point of view of an asymbolic, spasmodic body', but, Kristeva demurs, she does not go as far as to 'dissect language as Joyce does'.<sup>38</sup> It is in the light of this admittedly qualified endorsement that, where appropriate, I seek to demonstrate in detail the value of Kristeva's theoretical exposition for the understanding of Woolf's literary practice in the chapters that follow.



## CHAPTER II: JACOB'S ROOM

When Woolf condemns the Edwardian novelists, arguing that 'for us those conventions are ruin, those tools are death'(CE,1:330), her protest is not simply against the style and mode of writing of one specific literary generation (though it is this as well). Probing her discontent, one encounters a more fundamental problem, a dissatisfaction with representation, writing or, in Lacanian terms, the symbolic order and its intrinsic phallogentricity, for, as Lacanian psychoanalysis maintains, the symbolic is constituted with the phallus as privileged signifier. In this sense, as I argued above, Woolf's critique of Edwardian realism is ultimately a feminist protest as well. The famous 'series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged' is an image of the ordered life viewed by a unified, fixed subject. In opposing this, Woolf evokes the psychic dimension which is excluded from life as defined by the 'thetic' subject - not the rigidly coherent but rather the 'varying', 'unknown', 'uncircumscribed', that which shows 'aberration or complexity' in the unformed haze of its 'luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope' (CE, 2:106).

Woolf's dissatisfaction is, ultimately, with the symbolic order, with language itself which, as a code and structure, necessarily alienates and represses the incommensurable dimension of existential reality. When Woolf chides the Edwardians for their literary inability to grasp, 'whether we call it life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing'(CE, 2:105), she deplores their complacent blindness to the very possibility of such a truth or final signified, that which Lacan calls the Real<sup>1</sup> and which can never finally be caught in language. The desire for truth produces only an endless chain of signs, the substitution - indefinitely repeated - of one signifier for another. But literature nevertheless refuses to abandon its quest for a final adequation of language and the real. For as Roland Barthes argues: 'I said a moment ago that, apropos of knowledge, literature is categorically

realist, in that it never has anything but the real as its object of desire; and I shall say now...that literature is quite stubbornly unrealistic; it considers sane its desire for the impossible'.<sup>2</sup> Woolf criticizes Edwardian 'realism' in the name of this more radical 'real'. In The Voyage Out Terence's desire to 'write a novel about Silence' (VO, 262) incarnates this contradiction of the novel. He seeks to write a novel because the desire for a final truth is not abandoned, but a novel about silence because language necessarily excludes and defers that truth indefinitely. Woolf's short story title, 'An Unwritten Novel' (1920), also encapsulates the impossible desire for a full literary representation that would evade the duplicities of language, that would not, in Jacques Derrida's terms, surrender presence to 'difference'.

In another early sketch, 'Monday or Tuesday', the heron or narrative consciousness passes in the sky, 'desiring truth, awaiting it, laboriously distilling a few words, for ever desiring - '(HH, 12). Woolf's fiction is driven forwards by this desire for an elusive truth, a point where the narrative might seize a meaning which would at last halt the frustrating play of signs. This is shown both thematically and technically in her early experimental short stories. The desire for truth takes as its starting point the signs which fill the world, but the endeavour to read these signs rightly in order to grasp the truth only produces more signs, fabricates more signifiers. The truth is thus deferred, and this deferring (différance) sustains the discourse of the stories. Published in 1917, 'The Mark on the Wall' is the very first example of Woolf's distinctively modernist writing. It records the attempt to decipher a sign (the mark) on white paper (the wall), and comes to an end after a revealing comment from the other person in the room: '"I don't see why we should have a snail on our wall." Ah, the mark on the wall! It was a snail'(HH, 48). Yet even if one finds out what the mark on the wall really is, the narrator writes early in the



story, 'what should I gain? - Knowledge? Matter for further speculation?'(HH, 46).<sup>3</sup> The substitution of one signifier for another and the slippage of the signified beneath the signifier will never end.

'An Unwritten Novel' is basically structured in the same way as 'The Mark on the Wall', for it too begins with a curious sign which invites the narrator to decipher its meaning. The narrator seeks to interpret signs produced by the woman opposite her on the train: 'I read her message, deciphered her secret, reading it beneath her gaze'(HH, 16). Yet the truth is elusive and the final revelation is postponed, and this deferring provokes the play of the narrator's imagination and thus constitutes the very ground of her discourse: 'Have I read you right? But the human face - the human face at the top of the fullest sheet of print holds more, withholds more'(HH, 20). The discourse comes to an end when the narrator discovers, not the truth, but that the truth has slipped away: 'Well, but I'm confounded'(HH, 26). Since truth forever slides away from one's grasp, the story embodying that truth will never be written, hence 'an unwritten novel'.

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the human gaze is crucial in the establishment of a 'mirror relation', in which the Imaginary object bolsters the subject in an illusory self-identity by reflecting back to it an image that is at once itself and another. This initial establishment of an Imaginary relation is the germinating moment in the writing of a story, for without this illusory identification of the self with the object, the story and the practice of writing would be impossible. The narrator of 'An Unwritten Novel' is trapped into this imaginary relation by a woman's eyes, for while all other passengers 'forbade intercourse', the woman 'gazed into my eyes as if searching any sediment of courage at the depths of them'(HH, 15). The story records a process of increasing identification with the woman's acts: 'she saw me...she had communicated, shared her secret, passed her poison'(HH, 16). Thus only from this Imaginary perspective could the narrator start



writing the story of the woman, but once it is established, the narrator has to shield her eyes from the other's gaze in order to continue this illusory relation. The narrative consciousness enters a state in which subject and object are interchangeable: 'who was saying that eggs were cheap? You or I?(HH, 21). The gulf between subject and object being closed, all intermediary hindrances become transparent and the meaning of the object shines forth naturally. An ideal state of the self-presence of meaning is achieved: 'when the self speaks to the self, who is speaking?'(HH, 24). However, it is, after all, an illusion. When the woman opens her eyes again, the narrator discovers that they do not after all constitute a reciprocating gaze, and there is a break in the Imaginary relation. 'Now, eyes open, she looks out; and in the human eye - how d'you define it? - there's a break - a division - so that when you've grasped the stem the butterfly's off'(HH, 20). With the breakdown of the Imaginary bond, the narrator comes to realize its illusoriness: 'Well, my world's done for! What do I stand on? What do I know?...Who am I?(HH, 26). The collapse of the Imaginary is not simply the destruction of the other; since the other and the self are mutually dependent, the narrator has to ask not only 'Who are you?' but also 'Who am I?' Identity itself is threatened by the failure of the specular relationship. As the title itself suggests, 'An Unwritten Novel' thus dramatizes the problem of writing, the impossibility of closing the gap between the subject who writes and the subject who is written about.

On 26th January 1920, Woolf writes in her diary: 'some idea of a new form for a new novel. Suppose one thing should open out of another - as in An Unwritten Novel - only not for 10 pages but 200 or so...Mark on the Wall, K.G. and Unwritten Novel taking hands and dancing in unity'(WD, 23). This new novel becomes Jacob's Room, which is the first experimental novel written after her 1919 aesthetic manifesto. As part of her campaign against the Edwardians, it attempts to discover the new

style and form, the need of which she advocated in 'Modern Fiction'. After completing the novel, she wrote: 'There's no doubt in my mind that I have found out how to begin (at 40) to say something in my own voice' (WD, 47). Jacob's Room is fundamentally an extension of her earlier experimental short stories. Its major concern is the problem of a sign which remains elusive and enigmatic, the impossibility of reaching a final truth, which in turn precipitates a suspicion of signification itself and dissolves the complacent signifier-signified equivalence of Edwardian realism.

Woolf remarks that the labour expended by novelists like Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy to prove 'the solidity, the likeness to life, of the story' is not merely wasteful, but is rather 'labour misplaced to the extent of obscuring and blotting out the light of the conception' (CE, 2:106). In opposition to these novelists, Woolf announces her ambition towards a new form for a new novel in the diary entry already partially quoted above: 'no scaffolding; scarcely a brick to be seen; all crepuscular, but the heart, the passion, humour, everything as bright as fire in the mist' (WD, 23). This ambition is not simply the formal concern of Jacob's Room, but also constitutes the theme of the book, just as Woolf's experimental short stories are metafictional both formally and thematically. The theme of the novel is the bright fire of Jacob's being, but its very reverence for this evanescent quality results in the book's formal impossibility of rendering it. Woolf's polemic against Edwardian realism, which 'obscures' or 'blots out' the glow of essential being, is most directly enacted in the novel in Jacob's exasperation with the Cambridge tutor, Mr. Plumer. Exclaiming 'Oh God, Oh God, Oh God!', Jacob leaves the luncheon party 'to restore his sense of freedom': 'Bloody beastly!' (33). The social world that so discomforts him comprises 'Shaw and Wells and the serious sixpenny weeklies!' (33). The world of the older generation is presented as a gross material 'scaffolding' or 'brick', which smothers the flame of the fresh, free



spirit: 'the cities which the elderly of the race have built upon the skyline showed like brick suburbs, barracks, and places of discipline against a red and yellow flame'(34). Thus the novel rehearses Woolf's own polemic in 'Modern Fiction' or 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown'. This quarrel with the parental generation is also expressed in Jacob's own literary tastes, in his contempt for 'modern novels' (the only novelist for him is Fielding) and in his enthusiasm for Shakespeare, the Elizabethans, the Greeks(33, 121-122).

...black outline upon what we are; upon the reality; the moors and Byron; the sea and the lighthouse; the sheep's jaw with the yellow teeth in it...'I am what I am, and intend to be it,' for which there will be no form in the world unless Jacob makes one for himself. The Plumers will try to prevent him from making it. Wells and Shaw and the serious sixpenny weeklies will sit on its head. (34)

If the subject of the novel is 'What is Jacob?', it is also the impossibility of even articulating, let alone successfully fulfilling, this concern in the available literary forms. In 'Modern Fiction' Woolf defends the 'spiritual' James Joyce against Edwardian 'materialism', and writes:

he is concerned at all costs to reveal the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its messages through the brain, and in order to preserve it he disregards with complete courage whatever seems to him adventitious, whether it be probability, or coherence, or any other of these signposts which for generations have served to support the imagination of a reader when called upon to imagine what he can neither touch nor see.(CE, 2:107)

These are, of course, as much Woolf's own concerns as Joyce's, for in Jacob's Room she too will abandon probability, coherence, signposts, in order to let the 'flame' burn as it really is. David Lodge has characterized the experimentalism of this novel as a 'technique of radical and stylish deletion'. Such deletion is, he argues, 'the operation by which metonymic devices are produced', for 'structurally Jacob's Room belongs in the metonymic category'. 'Its experimentalism is



all performed on the chain of combination - the chain of contiguous events that is Jacob's life - and consists mainly in cutting away huge sections of this chain and viewing the remainder from odd angles and perspectives'.<sup>4</sup> The text moves from one event to another, one scene to another, from one character's speculation on Jacob to another's impression of him ('one thing', Woolf noted in the diary, 'open[ing] out of another'(WD, 23)). It accumulates people, objects, hints around Jacob, but the centre itself remains curiously vacant, as the characters themselves anxiously note: 'the silent young man', 'how little he said', 'if he is going to get on in the world he will have to find his tongue'(JR, 58, 116, 70). Nor does the text offer us, from the inside, a phenomenology of the protagonist's mind; we are informed that 'he lacked self-consciousness'(69), and this stress on Jacob's unconsciousness is recurrent. Sitting in the train 'unconscious'(28) or asleep 'unconscious'(12), Jacob is a kind of lacuna in the consciousness of the text, an absent centre, a fissure in the text round which the other characters gravitate. This technique of 'deletion', which generates a central lacuna in the novel, is Woolf's specific against Edwardian realism. She denounces Bennett as 'the worst culprit' 'in as much as he is by far the best workman':

He can make a book so well constructed and solid in its craftsmanship that it is difficult for the most exacting of critics to see through what chink or crevice decay can creep in. There is not so much as a draught between the frames of the windows, or a crack in the boards. And yet - if life should refuse to live there? (CE,2:104)

Solidly immaculate construction thus drives life from the novel, as if only chinks, crevices and cracks let through the air that sustains its flame. At one point, Jacob's Room reports the opinion that 'character-drawing is a frivolous fireside art, a matter of pins and needles, exquisite outlines enclosing vacancy, flourishes, and mere scrawls' (154-155). If it is so, than vacancy had better be left undisguised, for

one will anyway endow Jacob with 'all sorts of qualities he had not at all'(72). Aware of the formidable problems of epistemology and signification, the novel refuses to define or describe Jacob or the essence of his being. Even if one tries to do so, 'there remains over something which can never be conveyed to a second person save by Jacob himself. Moreover, part of this is not Jacob but Richard Bonamy - the room; the market carts; the hour; the very moment of history'(71). The best the text can do is to move around Jacob in metonymic fashion, collecting odds and ends from the world surrounding him. Hence the title Jacob's Room, rather than, say, Jacob Flanders, as if the living flame of the young man's spirit, his 'luminous halo', will shine through from the room.

The novel notes that over the doorway of Jacob's eighteenth century rooms 'a rose, or a ram's skull, is carved in the wood'(69, 176). What does this curious indeterminacy mean? It does not seem to be just another item contributing to the book's characteristic 'effect of haziness' which, as Hermione Lee points out, arises 'largely from the syntactical qualities of the writing'. In fact, even such an astute practical critic as Lee ignores (represses) this peculiar ambiguity in the text, reducing it simply to 'his London rooms with the ram's skull over the door'.<sup>5</sup> From a mere descriptive viewpoint, it is difficult to see how two such different objects could be confused with each other. We may therefore interpret the phrase as a trace of the novel's own reflexive meditations on the nature of the fictional process itself. The ram's skull or sheep's skull is a key image associated with Jacob from the beginning of the book. 'The sheep's jaw with the yellow teeth in it' was offered as an image of the intense reality of Jacob's being, in contrast to the solemn, stifling world of the Plumers. As a boy, Jacob had picked up a sheep's skull on the beach, as if the novel sought to infuse the breath of life into this skull. A skull that might be



transfigured into 'a luminous halo' may be seen as an emblem of the novel's own aspiration to totalize the series of glimpses, hints and fragmentary remarks about Jacob into a triumphant revelation of the essence of his being.

It seems to me that the hesitation between 'ram's skull or rose' points towards a central polarity in Woolf's aesthetic: the opposition of allegory and symbol. The question at stake in Jacob's Room is whether the novel can transform the scattering of inert objects in, for example, Jacob's empty room at Cambridge into an organic unity, a skull into a rose. Its problem is whether the connotations accumulated around Jacob will, in a transfiguring flash, transform that absent centre into some resplendent symbol. The American theorist Paul de Man, in his campaign against the Romantic fetishization of the symbol, argues that the symbol is the product of the organic notion of literary form, in which life and form are identical - an effect valued by Coleridge as 'translucence': 'the material substantiality dissolves and becomes a mere reflection of a more original unity that does not exist in the material world'. Compared with this glamorous notion of the symbol as 'an expression of unity between the representative and the semantic function of language', or as 'totality' or 'translucence' in which ideality shines through a reduced materiality, allegory appears mechanical and uncouth. In the allegorical form the original meaning is devoid of substance, for in contrast to the symbol, in which the yoking of being and signification is based on 'the organic coherence of the synecdoche', in allegory 'it is a pure decision of the mind'.<sup>6</sup> Or as Frank Lentricchia succinctly summarizes: 'symbol is ontologically full while allegory is thin at best, and at worst "unsubstantial"...only an illusion of being'.<sup>7</sup>

I have cited David Lodge's argument that Woolf clearly exemplifies a general tendency of modernist writers to develop from metonymic (realist) to metaphoric (symbolist) representations of experience, and Woolf certainly belongs to this symbolist heritage of Anglo-American modernism.



With an acute awareness of her times as 'an age of fragments'(CE, 2:156), she emphasizes the need of 'synthesis', the power of metaphor in poetry (CE, 2:93-102), and against the drab world of the Edwardian 'naturalists', she longs for the spiritual triumph of the symbolist novel. Yet with this recognition of her age as fragmented, she also has a clear-sighted awareness that the symbolist dream of organic unity is no longer easily attainable; truth and sign have fallen asunder. By a significant ambiguity - ram's skull or rose - the novel seems to record a doubt about the nature of its own achievement. It suggests that a distance has opened up between Woolf's aspiration towards totality and what the text itself actually shows.

The novel early on inscribes a dour awareness of the impossibility of the symbol, an awareness that the sign is now radically severed from the origin. As Jacob strays on the beach and picks up the sheep's skull, his brother Archer hunts for him, shouting 'Ja - cob!': 'The voice had an extraordinary sadness. Pure from all body, pure from all passion, going out into the world, solitary, unanswered, breaking against rocks - so it sounded'(7). Symbolism is only possible in the context of what Jacques Derrida terms 'phonocentrism', which postulates the 'absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning'<sup>8</sup>, for this belief is, after all, the founding myth of the symbol, in which meaning redeems and illuminates the materiality of language from within. Archer's cry is thus a Utopian image of language, whose possibility is, however, immediately denied by the fact that it is unanswered, a vain call, hence its 'extraordinary sadness'. This vain call for Jacob is to be repeated by his friend Bonamy at the end of the novel; in this case, too, it receives no answer. The novel deconstructs phonocentrism despite its own deep nostalgia for a transcendental source of meaning which shines through pur<sup>ified</sup> of materiality, and it grudgingly confirms the impossibility of the project

of the symbol.

The novel is obsessed with the problem of the sign, its radical separation from the origin, the arbitrary relation of signifier and signified, and with the problem of speech and writing, for this latter opposition is another version of the duality of symbol and allegory. Symbolism is possible only in the context of a phonocentrism that (at least, in theory) subdues the materiality of the sign to a surge of spirit; while the practice of writing could be taken as an allegory of allegory itself, since it draws its scattered material fragments into endless, unmotivated formations of meaning. Such concerns of the novel are best focused when the question of the letter is discussed. 'Let us consider letters': when the narrator launches into speculation on letters, what is at stake is not just the problem of epistles but also that of signs in general, the problem of writing itself: 'to see one's own envelope on another's table is to realize how soon deeds sever and become alien. Then at last the power of the mind to quit the body is manifest, and perhaps we fear or hate or wish annihilated this phantom of ourselves, lying on the table'(91). Writing is the death of the origin. Letters are 'speech attempted', 'venerable', 'brave', 'forlorn, and lost'(91). But sending one's voice over the telephone is no more successful than writing a letter in this attempt to 'penetrate': 'Can I never know, share, be certain?'(92). The phonocentric myth is deconstructed even by such everyday experiences, and the nature of language as 'proto-writing', as a system of differences prior to the division between speech and writing, is revealed. Once cut off from the origin - and this is necessary for signification to function - writing possesses an alarming freedom of its own and becomes untrustworthy. Moreover, in addition to this inherent duplicity of language, the writer may not even aim to convey truth. He or she may rather consider writing as a convenient disguise or simply flinch from the difficulty of truthfulness. Mrs. Flanders does never and can never write what she



really wants to: 'Don't go with bad women...and come back, come back, come back to me'(89); her Oedipal jealousy succumbs to repression and never reaches the written page. Nor does Jacob write what matters to him: 'that letter-writing is practised mendaciously nowadays, particularly by young men travelling in foreign parts, seems likely enough'(124). Inherently or contingently, letters are false, and this is so across the whole range of written texts.

The same theme is emphasized with names and epitaphs. Though proper names should have a privileged relation to original truth, they all fail to grasp that truth, and are even on occasion highly deceitful. The connection between the name and its bearer is, in fact, dubious and arbitrary. Betty Flanders chose the epitaph 'Merchant of this city' for her husband's tombstone, since she had to call him something, though there is no reason why he should be called so: 'as many still remembered, he had only sat behind an office window for three months, and before that had broken horses, ridden to hounds, farmed a few fields, and run a little wild'(14). What he was remains unresolvable, as does the novel's main inquiry into the nature of Jacob. The relation between the designation and the designated may not be simply unclear but blatantly inappropriate. The prostitute Florinda was given her name 'by a painter who had wished it to signify that the flower of her maidenhood was still unplucked'(76). The confidante, Mother Stuart, ('dirty lodging-house wallpaper she was behind the chastity of Florinda'(76-77) would meaningfully point out that Stuart is the name of a Royal house, 'but what that signified, and what her business was, no one knew'(76). Here again the bond between the name and its bearer is shown to be broken. Another example of the lack of necessity linking name and bearer is the villa of the Cambridge don, Mr. Plumer. It is dubbed 'Waverley', but in the most inconsequential way: 'not that Mr. Plumer admired Scott or would have chosen any name at all, but names are useful when you have to



entertain undergraduates'(31). How, moreover, can one deduce the truth, however inquisitive one might be, if one does not get the name right in the first place, like Mrs. Papworth who cleans for Bonamy in Lincoln's Inn: 'Mr. Sanders was there again; Flanders she meant'(100). It is in the act of naming that language seems most unproblematically to get a purchase on the world beyond signs; here, if anywhere, it seems to serve a humbly referential function. By foregrounding the arbitrariness, ironic ineptitude or even the sheer effacement of names, Jacob's Room asserts that even at this most basic level 'truth' remains bewilderingly elusive.

Already distanced from the origin, the sign is only distanced further and further by any effort to return to that origin. Two months after his departure for Greece, Jacob's face is replaced in Fanny Elmer's mind by another sign, the statue of Ulysses:

Sustained entirely upon picture post cards for the past two months, Fanny's idea of Jacob was more statuesque, noble, and eyeless than ever. To reinforce her vision she had taken to visiting the British Museum, where, keeping her eyes downcast until she was alongside of the battered Ulysses, she opened them and got a fresh shock of Jacob's presence, enough to last her half a day.(170)

Since Ulysses is celebrated in Homer for his cunning resourcefulness, craftiness, even deceit, we may perhaps interpret him here as a figure for the untrustworthiness of language itself. The quest for the hidden meaning of a sign results only in the endless replacement of one signifier by another. 'But something is always impelling one to hum vibrating, like the hawk moth, at the mouth of the cavern of mystery' (72). A cavern might be straightforwardly penetrated, but the image of the moth suggests that to do so may be self-destructive, and the novel indeed implies that it is so. Both the quester and the object of the quest are moths, a double image Woolf had used in 'An Unwritten Novel': 'Have I read you right?...the moth that hangs in the evening over the yellow flower....I won't raise my hand. Hang still, then, quiver, life,

soul, spirit...I, too, on my flower'(HH,20). Jacob himself is an enthusiastic moth-hunter, and the novel ominously associates this pursuit with death; it notes that on the night when he caught a rare species, 'the tree had fallen'(21), 'a sort of death in the forest'(30).

In its nostalgia for a Utopia where the plenitude of the sign was once attained, Western thought has traditionally always accorded a special position to ancient Greece. It is thus not surprising that Greek culture is a persistent enthusiasm of Jacob's, and that he himself travels to Greece to experience it firsthand in the course of the novel. Of himself and his Cambridge friends, he declares: 'we are the only people in the world who know what the Greeks meant'(75). As I noted above, Jacob is compared to the statue of Ulysses, and even the sheep or ram's skull associated with him is a motif that links him to classical Greece. For the wood-carved ram's skull over the door of his room is a characteristic eighteenth century device which was revived from classical Greek and Roman sculpture by Robert Adam.<sup>9</sup> Greece itself is in a sense the 'skeleton' of European civilization, the very base on which more than two millennia of European culture has been founded. Its ancient, white columns surviving on the dry, bare land, Greece in the novel is perhaps appropriately imaged as bleached 'bones': a stark truth stripped of the elegant trappings and mufflings of modern European life.

Jacob's enthusiasm for Greece conceived as the stylistic antithesis of the stuffy or flabby modes of contemporary culture is shared by the author. In her essay 'On Not Knowing Greek', published in The Common Reader in 1925, Woolf expounds the conventional Western idea of Greece as Utopian origin. 'The stable, the permanent, the original human being is to be found there'(CE, 1:4); thus she praises Sophocles. She acclaims the 'symbolic power' of Aeschylus, which lets the essence of meaning shine through his metaphors. 'The meaning is just on the far side of language. It is the meaning which in moments of astonishing excitement



and stress we perceive in our minds without words'(CE, 1:7). Woolf emphasizes as a crucial characteristic of Greek drama that it is meant to be listened to, not read:

For none of these dramatists had the licence which belongs to the novelist, and, in some degree, to all writers of printed books, of modelling their meaning with an infinity of slight touches which can only be properly applied by reading quietly, carefully, and sometimes two or three times over. Every sentence had to explode on striking the ear, however slowly and beautifully the words might then descend, and however enigmatic might their final purport be. No splendour or richness of metaphor could have saved the Agamemnon if either images or allusions of the subtlest or most decorative had got between us and the naked cry (CE, 1:8)

It is not only in drama but also in all areas of life, philosophy, politics, that the people judged 'by ear', 'sitting out-of-doors at the play or listening to argument in the market-place'. Therefore they 'were far less apt than we are to break off sentences and appreciate them apart from the context'(CE, 1:10).

Woolf's praise of Greece in her essay is permeated by Derrida's 'phonocentrism'. The 'general force' of Aeschylus, the Sophoclean 'type of the original man or woman'(CE, 1:4), the meaning which 'we perceive in our minds without words', all these exemplify what Derrida has claimed to be the Western inheritance from Greek philosophy: 'the feelings of the mind, expressing things naturally, constitute a sort of universal language which can then efface itself'.<sup>10</sup> These qualities of Greek style - 'compactness of the expression', 'to speak plainly yet fittingly without blurring the outline or clouding the depths'(CE, 1:11), intensity and directness - are derived, in Woolf's speculations, from the warm climate which allowed the Greeks an outdoor existence in a small, organic community where 'everyone knows everyone else'. Woolf's conception of the Greek community is similar to the 'authentic' community which Derrida discusses: 'a community of speech where all the members are within earshot',<sup>11</sup> where, accordingly, the relations of the members with one another are aural and unmediated, unlike the social relations within



modern communities which are only occasional and fragmentary, passing through the detour of the written document. (Hence the narrator's ambivalence towards letters and telephone-calls in Jacob's Room, which are unsatisfactory but indispensable substitutes for a fuller community which does not exist.) In Derrida's mythical community, language is speech rather than writing, and therefore 'because the voice, the producer of the first symbols, has a relationship of essential and immediate proximity with the mind', the signifier and the signified do not yet know disparity; but this authentic community is irretrievably lost in modern society. Even the Greek language itself survives only in the 'fallen' mode of writing. 'We cannot hear it', complains Woolf (CE, 1:11), and she speculates that we can therefore never hope to grasp the truth of the Greek sentence. To show how far we are from the 'whole fling' of the Greek original, she instances Shelley taking twenty-one words of English to translate thirteen words of Greek. Modern languages thus have a kind of slack inertia far removed from the lean suppleness of Greek itself.

Yet in spite of all the possibilities of misunderstanding, Woolf contends that there is one unmistakeable characteristic of Greek literature; it is an impersonal literature, free from self-consciousness. This point is also relevant to Jacob's Room, for, as I have noted, unconsciousness is a key element in the characterization of Jacob. Unselfconscious and distinguished in appearance, Jacob is clearly associated with Greek art, and hence Fanny can find the statue of Ulysses a satisfying substitute for her absent lover. Lack of self-consciousness and impersonality derive from the happy unity of meaning and being, idea and form; Jacob is not afflicted by what T. S. Eliot would term the 'dissociation of sensibility', any more than Greek art is. In fact, Eliot's concept of the 'objective correlative' is not irrelevant here. Mowbray Allan has suggested that the origin of that notion might be

traced back to Pater and beyond him to the Hegelian idea of Greek art: 'this unity, this perfect harmony between the idea and its external manifestation, constitutes the second form of art - the Classic Form. Here art has attained its perfection, in so far as there is reached a perfect harmony between the idea as spiritual individuality, and the form as sensuous and corporal reality'.<sup>12</sup> And Eliot's own 'objective correlative' is precisely an aspiration towards this perfect match of inner and outer which Greek art traditionally exemplifies:

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.<sup>13</sup>

Symbolism in poetry is essentially a belief in 'a special unarbitrary mode of language'.<sup>14</sup> As a magical fusion of signifier and signified, being and meaning, the symbol testifies to a miraculous state in which the body or sensuous form is made luminous by the spirit within. It is, then, no surprise that the symbolist Eliot diagnoses Woolf's collection of short stories, Monday or Tuesday in precisely these terms, conceding a certain merit to the author's persistence in her literary perversity:

A good deal of the secret of the charm of Mrs. Woolf's shorter pieces is the immense disparity between the object and the train of feeling which it has set in motion. Mrs. Woolf gives you the minutest datum, and leads you on to explore, quite consciously, the sequence of images and feelings which float away from it. The result is something which makes Walter Pater appear an unsophisticated rationalist, and the writing is often remarkable. The book is one of the most curious and interesting examples of a process of dissociation which in that direction, it would seem, cannot be exceeded.<sup>15</sup>

Woolf's experimental short stories are, indeed, in scandalous opposition to the canons of Eliot's own aesthetic, displaying the subtlest cultivation of the 'dissociation' of object and feeling, outer and inner; and Jacob's Room, as an extension of the short stories, would also earn



Eliot's disapproval. In the novel there is an acute sense that the miraculous unity of form and idea or body and spirit is no longer possible, that meaning/truth and the sign are radically sundered. Both thematically and formally, the text demonstrates a 'postlapsarian' awareness of some catastrophic unhinging of being and meaning, and is tormented by its urgent need to decipher signs and fragments from which God has apparently withdrawn. It is Jacob himself who is this withdrawn God, the absent centre that leaves only shards, shreds and signs for us to decipher laboriously. The narrator's celebration of Jacob is an expression of nostalgia for the lost origin, and yet since it is, after all, irretrievably lost in the fallen present, a sense of remoteness and intangibility also characterizes him. Hence that unidentified 'overpowering sorrow'(47) which underpins the elegiac tone of the novel throughout.

Jacob incarnates a 'Greek' plenitude of meaning that the novel simultaneously knows to be unattainable, and his lack of self-consciousness pertains to him at least as much as an empty sign as a desirably full one. When the novel first offers a detailed description of Jacob's room at Cambridge, it is empty: 'listless is the air in an empty room, just swelling the curtain; the flowers in the jar shift. One fibre in the wicker arm-chair creaks, though no-one sits there'(37), and these very same lines are repeated after Jacob's death at the end of the text. The faint movement of air gives a brief, illusory effect of Jacob's spirit animating the room, but only in the end emphasizes its vacancy the more poignantly, and thus the novel acknowledges its recognition of Jacob as an empty sign. If this is so, then the answer to the hesitation between 'rose' or 'ram's skull' seems to incline towards the skull (allegory) rather than the rose (symbol). The innumerable objects that gather around the absent centre stubbornly refuse to be synthesized into an organic whole. Fragments of impressions and opinions



remain forever tantalising, generating only more and more interpretation. Despite the novel's aspiration towards symbolism and its nostalgia for the phonocentric ideal - a voice purged of materiality - it remains ineradically allegorical. Heaps of objects, people, activities accumulate until 'the observer is choked with observations'(67). Too many objects present themselves, provocatively, as signs to be read: 'so many things to look at'(79).

Each had his past shut in him like the leaves of a book... a book known to him...and his friends could only read the title, James Spalding or Charles Budgeon, and the passengers going the opposite way could read nothing at all - save 'a man with a red moustache,' 'a young man in grey smoking a pipe.'(63)

Every face, every shop, bedroom window, public-house, and dark square is a picture feverishly turned - in search of what? It is the same with books. What do we seek through millions of pages?(96)

The world becomes text, alluring one towards a final meaning with its profusion of emblems, but instead of offering a moment of totalization in which a transcendental signifier would be revealed, it overloads, even overwhelms the observer with more and more signifiers, rendering a final truth ever more distant.

Walter Benjamin, as one of the critics who attempts to redeem allegory from the Romantic denigration of it, notes of the Baroque Trauerspiel: 'Seventeenth-century allegory, obsessed as it is by emblem and hieroglyph, is a profoundly visual form; but what swims into visibility is nothing less than the materiality of the letter itself'.<sup>16</sup> In the light of this comment, one might consider the short story, 'The Lady in the Looking-Glass' (published in 1929), which deals in a more focused way with some of the issues raised by Jacob's Room. The theme of the story is the attempt to decipher an enigmatic sign, Isabella ('reticent', like Jacob), in her room while the house is empty. In the looking-glass objects cease 'to breathe and lie still in the trance of immortality' and become signs, while in the real world, the

faint noise of the outside air - 'the voice of the transient' - , comes and goes 'like human breath'(HH, 87). The convolvulus, letters, traces, the 'spindly and hieroglyphic' legs of the furniture constitute a sprawling mesh of signs, opaque and material, or what we can designate écriture. The desire of the narrative consciousness, however, is to catch Isabella's 'profounder state of being', 'the state that is to the mind what breathing is to the body'(HH, 90). Thus the dualism breathing/body, voice/written signs structures the story, and the narrative consciousness expresses a phonocentric desire for a truth freed of the clogging materiality of the body or writing. Isabella is compared to 'the fantastic and the tremulous convolvulus', but the narrative condemns its own simile as 'worse than idle and superficial': 'they are cruel even, for they come like the convolvulus itself trembling between one's eyes and the truth'(HH, 87). The paradox of figurative language is that despite its efforts to violently 'turn' (trope) literal meaning in an effort to hew close to the contours of the object, it may display an alarming and autonomous life of its own beneath which the object is submerged. This fear of figurality lies deep within the traditional empiricism of English culture, as is shown by its being common to both Woolf and one of her severest critics, F.R. Leavis. In Revaluation Leavis denounces Shelley's poetry for just such a surplus of signification:

In the growth of those 'tangled boughs' out of the leaves, exemplifying as it does a general tendency of the images to forget the status of the metaphor or simile that introduced them and to assume an autonomy and a right to propagate, so that we lose in confused generations and perspectives the perception or thought that was the ostensible raison d'être of imagery, we have a recognized essential trait of Shelley's: his weak grasp upon the actual.

Shelley's images 'stand for nothing that Shelley could have pointed to in the scene before him'.<sup>17</sup> Refusing this humbly referential function, they foreground only themselves, thus enacting the kind of 'dissociation' between object and feeling that, as we have seen, Eliot identified in



Woolf's work. The desire for transparent reference is the other side of Woolf's demand for speech rather than writing, breathing rather than body, essence rather than the inspissation of the mere phenomenon. For both Leavis and the narrator of the story, the signifier is tolerable only at the moment of its self-effacement before the signified. The story refuses the materiality of the sign, questing instead for a final signified: 'There must be truth; there must be a wall'(87).

At last Isabella herself appears. Under the pressure of the interpreter's desire to 'fasten her down there'(89), the sign opens itself to indeterminacy or polyvalence. The expression of her eyes is 'mocking or tender, brilliant or dull', and one is left with only the 'indeterminate outline' of her face. None the less, the story does seem to have its moment of revelation in which the elusive sign is finally fixed and penetrated, as Isabella renders herself a sign in the tableau of reflections in the mirror:

At once the looking-glass began to pour over her a light that seemed to fix her; that seemed like some acid to bite off the unessential and superficial and to leave only the truth...Everything dropped from her - clouds, dress, basket, diamond - all that one had called the creeper and convolvulus.(HH, 91-92)

But just as one expects to encounter 'the hard wall beneath', which the creepers had concealed, that final meaning after the tangle of hieroglyphs is cleared or 'the woman herself', 'there was nothing. Isabella was perfectly empty'(92). The sign conceals nothing; it is vacant; there neither was once an origin, nor ever will be a final meaning, behind it. For the signifier precedes the signified: the signifier lures one into the play of signs only to produce more signifiers, refusing to be pinned down to the signified. Nor can one reach back to an 'essence' of Isabella from the 'traces' of her that one might find in the letters in her room; meaning does not precede its trace, but is always part of a system of traces. There is, Derrida



argues, no pure presence, for presence is only a 'synthesis of traces'.<sup>18</sup> Deconstructing the philosophy of presence and phonocentrism, Derrida interrogates the hierarchy which has subjugated writing to speech, and he exposes the mauvaise foi of speech as the self-presence of meaning. Writing is not the mere secondary trace of a pre-existing truth, nor an innocent recording technique. Rather than being superfluous to meaning, the 'trace' or 'proto-writing' is the very condition of signification. As Isabella stands 'veined and lined', there are only traces, nothing beyond or behind - only creepers and tendrils with no supporting wall. The story exposes the materiality of the sign and the inevitable disappointment of any nostalgia for a transcendental source of meaning. The figurative language which 'come[s] like the convolvulus itself trembling between one's eyes and the truth' is in fact the very nature of language through and through. 'She suggested the fantastic and the tremulous convolvulus rather than the upright aster, the starched zinnia, or her own burning roses alight like lamps on the straight posts of their rose trees'(87). Here, as with the 'rose or a ram's skull' of Jacob's Room, two possibilities are presented to us: the 'allegorical' convolvulus, which interferes between the gaze and 'truth' and asserts its tangled lines as emblems to be decoded, or (in Benjamin's terms) the 'auratic' object,<sup>19</sup> the lamp-like rose, a symbol through which the essence of being shines to become a luminous halo. But Isabella is a convolvulus rather than a burning rose, as the story finally confirms; and so too, perhaps, is Jacob. Thus though Woolf's texts aspire to the symbol, they also inscribe a recognition that such triumphs of transcendental meaning may no longer be possible in a fallen world. This 'fall', I shall suggest, is related by the novel to the First World War.

It is well known that Woolf located the change of 'human character' 'in or about December, 1910'(CE, 1:320). Her particular reasons for assigning that date (probably the first Post-Impressionist exhibition)

are qualified by the jesting tone, her excessive precision. For Woolf knows well, as she attests in such phrases as 'I will hazard', 'more disputable perhaps', 'one must be arbitrary', that epochs do not arrive so punctually. Apart from December 1910, she often names the First World War as a turning point involving radical social change.<sup>20</sup> In A Room of One's Own, the sight of a tailless cat triggers the narrator's awareness of some lack in the contemporary age, of some crucial difference between the prewar and postwar periods. At a luncheon party before the war people were, she claims, 'accompanied by a sort of humming noise, not articulate, but musical, exciting, which changed the value of the words themselves'(RO, 19). The narrator contrasts 'the difficulty of modern poetry'(RO, 22) with the naive energies of Victorian verse. Tennyson and Christina Rossetti, like the Romantics for Matthew Arnold, do not know enough, but Woolf is here more inclined to lament their lost vigour and 'abandonment'(RO, 22) than she is to praise the moderns for their sophistication or irony. She attributes this post-Victorian disillusionment to the war: 'Shall we lay the blame on the war? When the guns fired in August 1914, did the faces of men and women show so plain in each other's eyes that romance was killed?'(RO, 23). Whether this is a desolating loss of belief or rather an awakening into maturity from the 'illusion' or mauvaise foi of the Victorians, it is clear that in this postlapsarian age, when the transcendental signified has withdrawn, symbolism is not possible. It is no longer a simple task to harmonize the complex experiences of modern life, the profusion of material objects that surround us; thought and feeling, meaning and being are split asunder, 'dissociated'. Allegory now becomes, in the words of Fredric Jameson, 'the privileged mode of our own life in time, a clumsy deciphering of meaning from moment to moment, the painful attempt to restore a continuity to heterogeneous, disconnected instants'.<sup>21</sup> Hence it is that Jacob's Room moves from moment to moment, object to object, in metonymic fashion as it seeks to decipher the emblems it encounters.



I have used the image of a theological 'fall' in discussing the world of Jacob's Room, for it is the catastrophic advent of the 1914-18 war which pitches English culture out of its Edwardian innocence into the embittered 'experience' of the 1920s. At the same time, this theological metaphor is also crucial to the symbolist aesthetic, since the symbol is viewed as the postlapsarian fragment of a unity of being that was once continuously available in the mythic organic community. Symbolist historiography is therefore preoccupied with locating the precise moment of this fall from grace - the Renaissance for Yeats, the English Civil War for Eliot<sup>22</sup> - and Virginia Woolf applies this paradigm to her own experience of contemporary history. But this historical 'fall' is a punctual event that brings to individual consciousness what has, in fact, always existed, or, more strictly, in this particular case, what has never existed - the plenitude of the sign.

The war destroys Jacob, as it does the possibility of the symbol; it leaves his room untenanted, an empty sign. Jacob is certainly the war's victim, a youthful life wasted in a war started by his elders, but the relation between him and the First World War is in fact more complex than this. Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of the 'theological' model of history seems to me particularly helpful in analyzing this relation. For Derrida there is no moment of pure presence which then succumbs to a disastrous Fall because presence is 'always already' inhabited by difference. It is not that 'evil' or 'experience' comes from the outside to violently overthrow a defenceless innocence, but rather that 'innocence' is always contaminated by its opposite principle from the very start. Derrida demonstrates this powerfully in his analysis of Saussure in Of Grammatology. When Saussure complains that writing, which should merely be a secondary technique for recording speech, is insidiously affecting and denaturing pronunciation itself, Derrida retorts that 'the "usurpation" of which Saussure speaks, the violence by



which writing would substitute itself for its own origin...such a reversal of power cannot be an accidental aberration. Usurpation necessarily refers us to a profound possibility of essence'.<sup>23</sup> In Jacob's Room itself, the novel's ambivalent hesitation between a theological and 'Derridean' view of history can be seen in the following passage: "'Jacob," wrote Mrs. Flanders, with the red light on her page, "is hard at work after his delightful journey..." "The Kaiser," the far-away voice remarked in Whitehall, "received me in audience"'(173). The juxtaposition first dramatizes the incommensurability of private and public life, implying that the former is the helpless victim of the large-scale machinations of the latter. The passage is thus a grim 'dramatic irony' where the audience is allowed a fuller glimpse of the imminent catastrophe than is perceived by the limited vision of the protagonist (here Mrs. Flanders). Yet in the light of the text's ambivalence over Jacob, we may also sense Derrida's 'profound possibility of essence'. The novel ironizes its own irony, raises its initial irony to the second degree, so that the initially shocking gap between private and public blurs and narrows to the point where Jacob and the Kaiser do not seem so different after all; both are representatives of a blind and destructive patriarchy.

The novel in fact at various points notes Jacob's complicity with this destructive masculine power. Much later, in Three Guineas, Woolf explicitly connects Fascist war-mongering to an aggressiveness which may or may not be innate in the male, and this is an association that Jacob's Room, though far less emphatically, also suggests. When the boy Jacob is hunting for moths late at night, 'the tree had fallen':

There had been a volley of pistol-shots suddenly in the depths of the wood. And his mother had taken him for a burglar when he came home late...The tree had fallen, though it was a windless night, and the lantern, stood upon the ground, had lit up the still green leaves and the dead beech leaves. It was a dry place. A toad was there. And the red underwing had circled round the light and flashed and gone. The red underwing had never come back, though Jacob had waited...'How

you frightened me!' she had cried. She thought something dreadful had happened...There he stood pale, come out of the depths of darkness, in the hot room, blinking at the light. (21-22)

This incident remains mysterious, its aftertaste only a vague ominousness; only retrospectively can it be seen as foreboding Jacob's tragic end. Mrs. Flanders's lamentation - 'the only one of her sons who never obeyed her'(21) - hints that Jacob's death is the result of his going astray from maternal protection, evading maternal solicitude: 'You won't go far this afternoon, Jacob'(22), 'come back, come back, come back to me'(89). From the beginning of the novel Jacob is 'tiresome', 'naughty', 'a handful', 'obstinate'(5, 8, 9) towards his mother. Early on Jacob's brother Archer interrupts his mother in her letter-writing: '"...nothing for it but to leave," she read. "Well, if Jacob doesn't want to play..."'(5), where the former phrase is from a sentence she has just written. This apparently contingent juxtaposition may, however, bear more meaning than it initially seems to. It evokes Jacob's general revolt against the parental generation, as later in the cases of Mr. Plumer or a Professor Bultul of Leeds - revolts that are 'insolent' yet endorsed by the narrator as 'perfectly right'(34, 68), but it also evokes the mother's helpless resignation, as her weary desire to 'leave' seems to suggest a wish to abdicate responsibility for this difficult son rather than allude to the mere problems of holiday accommodation. Yet there is an ambivalence here, for two issues - Jacob's revolt against the whole older generation, and his departure into a man's world from the mother's territory - are shown in conjunction, but are in fact not reducible to each other. Jacob is presented as simultaneously an idealist rebel who stands up against the despicable world of the elders and yet also as an adherent of the masculinity which is the very founding principle of the world with which, in his other guise, he is so indignant. This ambivalence afflicts Jacob's Room throughout, and points towards the fundamental problem of the novel.



The precious moth which the boy Jacob had been hunting escapes, and if we recall the general symbolic value of the moth in Woolf - 'life, soul, spirit'(HH, 20) - this midnight moth-hunting clearly suggests a lethal violence, a dangerous intrusion into privacy, as is also implied by that imagery of 'pistol-shots' and the 'burglar' which terrifies Mrs. Flanders. This strange, violent group of images associated with the falling tree reappears later in the description of King's College Chapel, Cambridge, where Jacob is now a student, and thus links the university display of masculine virtue at its extreme with the ominous destruction of life. The narrator praises the light of Cambridge, projected out by the human intellect into an otherwise dark, formless chaos, and indulges in the fancy that 'the sky, washed into the crevices of King's College Chapel' is 'lighter, thinner, more sparkling than the sky elsewhere' (29-30). Turning to the chapel itself, the narrator is impressed by the procession of young men: 'how airily the gowns blow out, as though nothing dense and corporeal were within'(30). Cambridge is thus the locus of phonocentrism, where a spiritual voice or light triumphantly shines forth, subduing materiality. But that this effect can only be achieved by some unnaturally rigid control of the will is implied in the petrified 'sculptured faces' that sustain this 'certainty, authority controlled by piety'(30). This strenuous triumph of the human will over Nature is further instanced by the stained glass of the Chapel:

Neither snow nor greenery, winter nor summer, has power over the old stained glass. As the sides of a lantern protect the flame so that it burns steady even in the wildest night - burns steady and gravely illumines the tree-trunks - so inside the Chapel all was orderly. Gravely sounded the voices; wisely the organ replied, as if buttressing human faith with the assent of the elements.(30)

In this sanctuary of learning human power heroically subdues the hazardous flux of Nature, leaving 'all very orderly'(30). Here and elsewhere in the novel emerges a polarity characteristic of Woolf's work:



on the one hand, human will and reason, an ordered civilization; on the other, nature, darkness, chaos. A globe of light pure of contaminating materiality confronts the fertile yet threatening world of Darwinian evolution, of natural flux, and this is another version of the opposition symbol/allegory. Land and sea become major images for each term of this polarity: the Cornish coast, viewed from the ceaselessly undulating sea, wears 'an extraordinary look of calm, of sunny peace, as if wisdom and piety had descended upon the dwellers there'(47). Timothy Durrant, navigating his yacht, becomes for a brief, fanciful moment an image of heroic Man on a solitary journey through the universe, questing boldly forwards through the wilderness and bearing onwards the light of civilization. For Woolf, this formidable responsibility is specifically associated with the male, and will receive its most memorable embodiment in the figure of Mr. Ramsay in To the Lighthouse. In that novel the sea is on the whole a menacing 'fluidity' contrasted with the 'inside [of] the room' where exist 'order and dry land'(TL, 151-152). But, as I shall argue in my next chapter, the sea also has a more benign, equally traditional value as the 'maternal' ocean, the primitive matrix of the world, and such is its role in Mrs. Dalloway.

In the face of the 'trampling energy' of the wind which 'rolls the darkness' through the night streets, the subtleties of individual difference and the niceties of everyday social decorum are equally irrelevant: 'All faces - Greek, Levantine, Turkish, English - would have looked much the same in that darkness'(161). Yet despite the formidable power of the flux, the will affirms itself: 'At length the columns and the Temples whiten, yellow, turn rose; and the Pyramids and St. Peter's arise, and at last sluggish St. Paul's looms up'(161). In the end, indeed, the dark midnight wind, the persistent menace of 'a sea coldly, greenly, swaying outside' becomes almost imperceptible to the citizen immersed in the routines of quotidian life, particularly in a modern world governed by 'the day's meaning'(161). For the light of

civilization, which can be compared to 'the bright, inquisitive, armoured, resplendent, summer's day', 'has long since vanquished chaos...dried the melancholy mediaeval mists; drained the swamp and stood glass and stone upon it'(163). None the less, these impressive 'trappings' of civilized life and the nuances of individual difference will at last become mere 'skeleton', broken pieces of bone that will ultimately constitute the only remaining evidence of the existence of homo sapiens to the Darwinian scientist of the future. Who, the narrator asks, 'save the nerve-worn and sleepless, or thinkers standing...on some crag above the multitude, see things thus in skeleton outline, bare of flesh? In Surbiton the skeleton is wrapped in flesh'(162). The novel's recurrent imagery of skulls and bones (see at least 9, 69, 131-133, 162, 172, 176) serves as a stark reminder of this grim reality of a human existence caught up in the inescapable flux and decay of Darwinian nature. Darwinism may now be a familiar part of our world-picture, but for Jacob's Room it retains all the traumatic force that it had for the Victorians themselves. 'Perhaps...we do not believe enough. Our fathers at any rate had something to demolish', and Jacob still 'believes' enough to attempt to pit political commitment against the 'dark waters which lap us about'(137) and threaten to demolish human values. But the 'dark waters' are such a wholesale nullification of the socio-symbolic human world that both the novel and the hero are somewhat pessimistic about this political project: 'what use are fine speeches and Parliament, once you surrender an inch to the black waters?'(138). This loss of belief, whether or not it was illusion in the first place, leaves the moderns powerless. This problem is also pondered in A Room of One's Own, when the narrator recognizes the death of 'romance' in the postwar generation: 'why, if it was an illusion, not praise the catastrophe, whatever it was, that destroyed illusion and put truth in its place?'(RO, 23). In spite of her awareness that it was illusion, the narrator none the less covets



the passion which such illusion could generate, for only illusion and passion can sustain the globe of light, the symbol, civilization itself in the midst of, and in defiance of, the engulfing dark flux. If error is, as Nietzsche has argued, necessary and not simply contingent, life-sustaining rather than a dangerous confusion, then the narrator of A Room of One's Own is well justified in inquiring 'which was truth and which was illusion...?'(RO, 23-24)

Woolf's attitude to the contending forces of natural flux and the light of humanity is ambivalent. Nature, to be sure, is fearful, hostile, impenetrable by human reason. A lantern put under a tree attracts every insect in the forest: 'they amble round the lantern and blindly tap as if for admittance', but they 'have no purpose - something senseless inspires them'(JR, 30), thus the text suggests the irreducibility of Nature to human purposes. The half-dead tree - 'the still green leaves and the dead beech leaves'(21) - suddenly falls with as little reason.<sup>24</sup> The human world is, in contrast, a zone of security under the governance of reason. But this opposition between Nature/danger and reason/human security can also be seen from a different point of view, from which the valuations of Nature and Culture are reversed. For the reason and order imposed by the human will on Nature can be seen as a force which damages, even destroys, life in the necessary process of providing security. In the passage I have already cited, as the red underwing flies away and a large toad looks much 'besotted', the light of the lantern brusquely disturbs a nature which is, after all, the very matrix of life. 'A terrifying volley of pistol-shots rings out...a tree has fallen'(30), and the reader may well interpret this 'sort of death in the forest' as due to the intrusion of the lantern into the dark, seething fertility of the natural world. The aspiration towards 'light', towards 'elements' purged of any gross materiality, which impressed the narrator in King's College Chapel, also atrophies the spontaneous energies of life by its strained, constricting



use of the will. Such restraint and control are the governing principle of society in general, of 'the strokes which oar the world forward', 'together with the incessant commerce of banks, laboratories, chancellories, and houses of business':

And they are dealt by men as smoothly sculptured as the impassive policemen at Ludgate Circus. But you will observe that far from being padded to rotundity his face is stiff from force of will, and lean from the effort of keeping it so. When his right arm rises, all the force in his veins flows straight from shoulder to finger-tips; not an ounce is diverted into sudden impulses, sentimental regrets, wire-drawn distinctions. The buses punctually stop.(155)

The callous inhumanity of the social force that subdues men (for Woolf relates it exclusively to men) to such actions is best attested in the description of a naval engagement which immediately precedes the policeman's 'force of will'. 'The battle ships ray out over the North Sea, keeping their stations accurately apart', and 'at a given signal' the master gunner fires his guns with superb accuracy: 'With equal nonchalance a dozen young men in the prime of life descend with composed faces into the depths of the sea; and there impassively (though with perfect mastery of machinery) suffocate uncomplainingly together'(155). The inhuman suppression of natural emotion fostered by militarism, signalled in terms like 'nonchalance', 'impassively', 'uncomplainingly', reduces the young men to the sub-human status of 'tin soldiers', 'fragments of broken match-stick'(155); there is both a certain pathos in such phrases and yet a sense that, in themselves consenting to this dehumanization, they have forfeited a right to our full sympathy when they at last become victims of the violence it had always implicitly entailed. The policeman too reduces himself to the less than human; his face is as 'smoothly sculptured' as those of the choristers in King's College Chapel.

The forces which such men fear as being dangerous and suppress in order to sustain civilization include 'sudden impulses, sentimental

regrets, wire-drawn distinctions'. These categories might conventionally be regarded as 'feminine' and are certainly so regarded by the novel, as for instance in Mrs. Flanders who, though she is a mature women of fifty with three sons, remains 'impulsive at heart'(90). Inquiry into human character, into 'depths of feeling', 'sentiment and sensation' or 'love', is marginalized by 'the men in clubs and Cabinets' to the fireside or the drawing-room, female spaces where such woman's chatter can be tolerated as a mere 'matter of pins and needles'(153-155). Such marginalization must be rigidly maintained since, if even 'an ounce' of the force of male will were 'diverted' by sensation or feeling, the whole imposing social edifice would, in principle if not in immediate practice, be jeopardized.

The 'sculptured faces' of these men in turn recall Jacob; Fanny uses the statue of Ulysses as a substitute for him, and Florinda declares, 'Jacob. You're like one of those statues'(79). Jacob's masculinist rejection of feminine diversions had already been revealed by his musings in King's College Chapel. He feels that women should be banished, for it is their fault that his 'mind wanders': 'if the mind wanders it is because several hat shops and cupboards upon cupboards of coloured dresses are displayed upon rush-bottomed chairs. Though heads and bodies may be devout enough, one has a sense of individuals - some like blue, others brown; some feathers, other pansies and forget-me-nots'(30-31). Again, then, women seduce into errancy that 'force of will' that should flow with the unilateral rigidity of the policeman's gestures. The colourful diversity of the women, who are heterogeneous 'individuals', contrasts with the white-robed figures of the choristers; they disrupt, by their irreducible sensuousness, the men's lofty aspirations to a realm of pure spirit. More insultingly, Jacob compares women to dogs, for 'a dog destroys the service completely', and he associates them with the incontinent natural flux and impulse evoked elsewhere in the novel: 'wander[ing] down an aisle, looking, lifting a paw and approaching a



pillar with a purpose that makes the blood run cold with horror'. Both dogs and women should accordingly be kept 'on a gravel path', barred from a realm of spirituality which they are congenitally incapable of reverencing. One here necessarily recalls the episode in A Room of One's Own, where the heroine, who has wandered onto a private grass plot, is turned out by the Beadle of the college into 'the place [fit for her]' - 'the gravel'(RO, 9). Faced with an impossible ideal of devout concentration, Jacob's mind has not unnaturally begun to wander, but he projects the blame for his own lapses onto the women present at the service. However 'devout, distinguished, and vouched for' by their husband's spirituality and learning, these women are irredeemably tied to the body; 'they're as ugly as sin', reflects Jacob. His reference to 'sin' may serve to recall my account above of the 'fall' of the sign. On the evidence, Jacob seems likely to ascribe to women responsibility for this 'fall', which has rendered impossible the ideal of the symbol, reducing the sign to an allegorical status in which its materiality tempts one away from the rigours of pure spirit.

For women themselves, however, matters are otherwise. For them, the 'fall' has happened in the very beginning; the sign is 'always already' material. It is precisely the impossible rigour of the masculine project to exclude materiality (the woman) as disruption that has precipitated the calamity of war, and the war has in turn finally shattered the male illusion and led to the subjective acknowledgement of a fallen state that, objectively, had 'always already' been the case. In A Room of One's Own the narrator declares that certainly the war 'was a shock (to women in particular with their illusions about education, and so on) to see the faces of our rulers in the light of the shell-fire. So ugly they looked - German, English, French - so stupid'(RO, 23). As evidence of the bankruptcy of the very principle of masculine culture, the war was, however painful, a liberating experience for women. 'The Mark on the Wall' meditates on social change: 'the masculine point of view' which has



superseded Victorian standards and 'governs our lives', has become, since the war, 'half a phantom to many men and women, [and] soon, one may hope, will be laughed into the dustbin...leaving us all with an intoxicating sense of illegitimate freedom - if freedom exists...'(HH, 44). After the disappearance of all masculinist constraints there might come into being a Utopian world which would have dispensed once and for all with the technicians of the inhumane will: 'a world without professors or specialists or house-keepers with the profiles of policemen'(HH, 46).

Unleashed by the First World War, this critique of the dominant masculine ideology is latently present in Jacob's Room itself. Female antagonism towards men and their values is disseminated throughout the novel, as is a half-suppressed critique of male standards. This proto-feminist hostility emerges at innumerable moments in the novel and yet never becomes a fully focused theme; the marginal objections remain dissociated from each other, never cohere into a global critique. The novel sides with the very feminine characteristics that men denigrate and suppress with an implacable force of will: 'who shall deny that this blankness of mind, when combined with profusion, mother wit, old wives' tales, haphazard ways, moments of astonishing daring, humour, and sentimentality - who shall deny that in these respects every woman is nicer than every man?'(9). The text here describes Mrs. Flanders who, characteristically scatter-brained, has a moment of forgetfulness, the nuisance of which she dissolves in humour. For the novel, this lack of concentration is the condition of a rich, almost overflowing, mental abundance, which contrasts favourably with the rigid impassivity of the traffic policeman at Ludgate Circus. But if Mrs. Flanders's 'polyphonic' mind makes her less 'practical' than the narrowly utilitarian policeman, she is also more practical in the sense of being closer to the down-to-earth necessities of human living than he is. What she has temporarily forgotten is, precisely, 'the meat!', the humble but necessary flesh

itself, of which the lofty responsibilities of the male guardians of civilization cause them to lose sight. Later, as she writes a rejection of Mr. Floyd's offer of marriage, she suddenly, irrelevantly wonders, 'Did I forget about the cheese?'(19); the female mind thus operates simultaneously on various levels. Such incidents are proleptic of the more famous juxtaposition of Mrs. Ramsay's epiphanic revelation and the Boeuf en Daube in To the Lighthouse, which I discuss below, and similarly reveal the irreducible connection between women and corporeality. Such juxtapositions also subvert a 'male' standard of literary relevance and importance, in the way that Woolf elsewhere more programmatically recommends. They exemplify 'the difference between the man's and the woman's view of what constitutes the importance of any subject'(CW, 27), and demonstrate, as had Imagism in contemporary poetry,<sup>25</sup> that life does not necessarily exist 'more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small'(CE, 2:107). Not that, for the woman, the 'small' necessarily excludes the 'big' as, for the male, the big tends to do to the small. The 'base' materiality of the cheese does not prevent Mrs. Flanders from rising to the occasion created by the grander issues of love and matrimony; predictably 'inconsequent', her letter is none the less 'such a motherly, respectful...regretful letter' that Mr. Floyd treasures it for years(19).

It is not so far from the narrator's comment that 'every woman is nicer than every man' to Mrs. Norman's sudden alarm - 'men are dangerous' - as Jacob enters her compartment on the train(28). But the novel hints at a female response to the challenge of this potential danger from men. Contemplating her old cat Topaz (a keepsake from the rejected Mr. Floyd), Mrs. Flanders 'smiled, thinking how she had had him gelded, and how she did not like red hair in men'(20). As if the initial gelding were not enough, she also reflects that Topaz 'one of these days would have to be killed'. The derivation of the cat from Mr. Floyd suggests that the violence directed towards it is simultaneously directed towards him as



male, and this suggestion is strengthened by the remarkable proliferation of maimed men in this novel. Mr. Curnow 'lost his eye'(8), in a gunpowder explosion; old Jevons is dead and buried 'with one eye gone'(100), and Betty Flanders's admirer, Captain Barfoot is 'lame' and lacks 'two fingers on the left hand'(23). Such injuries and maimings are often the result of military service, 'having served his country'(23), and point to the dangerous, because self-destructive courage of men. But such glorification of the male, which is not anyway without its note of critique, may be the novel's way of salving its conscience for Mrs. Flanders's smile at the gelded cat, which testifies to a latent desire to castrate. The lost eyes are a Freudian equivalent of castration as well as testimony to military honour, and Mrs. Flanders's fondness for Captain Barfoot may relate to his being safely 'lame'.

I have argued throughout this chapter that the novel is deeply ambivalent towards the male world, which is both repressive yet apparently indispensable, just as Jacob is both victim and victimizer. Captain Barfoot is no less so, since though he is lame, he is also the strenuous representative of the responsibilities of civilization, a lone hero 'on the Bridge at night' who inspires women with the feeling that 'Here is law. Here is order. Therefore we must cherish this man'(26). Of the Captain, as of the policeman at Ludgate Circus, it can be said that there is 'something rigid about him', 'something military'(26,24). The novel's critique of Barfoot's values emerges in displaced form in the smothered rebelliousness of Mrs. Jarvis, who resents the rigid division of sexual roles: 'Yet I have a soul...and its the man's stupidity that's the cause of this, and the storm's my storm as well as his'(26). 'Too good for such a quiet place'(89) in her friend Mrs. Flanders's view, the discontented Mrs. Jarvis can find no outlet for her energy and talent, and in this she is representative of the women in the book generally, all of whom live frustrated in conditions of social, and often geographical,



marginalization. The Captain's invalid wife is 'civilization's prisoner' (23), confined to a bath-chair on the esplanade at Scarborough. Mrs. Pascoe lives in a lonely cottage on the Cornish cliff-edge, dreaming absorbedly of sophisticated high society in London. Mrs. Durrant is a Cornish resident whose social position gains her access to that London world, but this hardly guarantees her the satisfaction of which Mrs. Pascoe dreams: '"Why are you so sad?" Charlotte asked'(57). For however impressively 'phallic' in style Mrs. Durrant may be - 'firm', 'upright', 'aquiline', 'imperious', 'hard as iron'(54,56,154,153) - while 'enunciating strident politics with Sir Somebody'(151), she is in the end excluded from the decision-making centres of Whitehall where 'the course of history' is 'manfully determined'(172). But though her political life is confined to drawing-room chatter, she does none the less reveal an impressive astuteness: 'Poor Jacob...They're going to make you act in their play'(60), and as Paul Fussell notes in The Great War and Modern Memory, her phrase resonates beyond the amateur theatricals of its local context to that 'unthought-of kind of amateur theater, where [Jacob] will be destroyed'.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps the most poignant of these isolated or frustrated women is Clara Durrant, 'a virgin chained to a rock'(122), powerless, overshadowed by her mother, trapped in the tedious social role of 'pouring out tea for old men'(122).<sup>27</sup>

In contrast to these impotently peripheral women, Jacob and his friends are destined from the start to be the inheritors and bearers of the dominant culture, and this remains true despite their youthful revolt and coltishness. 'Himself the inheritor', Jacob is in Cambridge to receive the 'gift' accumulated by 'generations of learned men'; not surprisingly, therefore, he looks 'satisfied; indeed masterly'(43). And the 'room' of the novel's title is precisely that 'Room of One's Own' which the women addressed in the later feminist tract so disabingly lack. If Jacob represents the vitalistic forces of life in contrast with the oppressive social world of the Plumers - all Shaw, Wells and the

serious sixpenny weeklies - he himself represents a repressive blindness in relation to the women of the novel. He and Bonamy 'never noticed' the latter's charwoman, Mrs. Papworth, despite her 'motherly' care of them, and Jacob is culpably insensitive to Fanny Elmer's 'sentiment and sensation' or Clara Durrant's 'depths of feeling'(153).

The presence of these numerous discontented women around Jacob, this groundswell of female suffering, seems thus to articulate a deep-seated envy and critique of Jacob as representative upper middle-class young man. The First World War was then for Woolf a terrible proof of the fundamental wrong-headedness, even bloody-mindedness, of this masculine ideology, exposing the dangerous unbalance of its expulsion of the feminine. Her critique of the literary realism of her Edwardian contemporaries was always in principle, if not immediately in practice, a critical exposure of the male ideology, for this period would come to seem to her the culmination of 'the masculine point of view', as it does in 'The Mark on the Wall'(HH, 44). But her dissatisfaction with particular forms merges, as I noted at the beginning of this chapter, into a dissatisfaction with form as such, with the very principle of narrative fiction or, more generally still, with language itself, which is necessarily 'phallogocentric',<sup>28</sup> and therefore falls under Woolf's suspicion.

The novel protests the phallogocentrism of narrative fiction and, beyond that, of writing itself at its very beginning in the account of Mrs. Flanders's letter-writing. It testifies to the peculiar difficulties a woman faces when she attempts to write - her lack of a private space within the home, the family demands, pressures, disruptions that render the style of her writing scrappy and inconsequent. With an ambivalence that parallels its ambivalence towards the male culture that Jacob represents, the novel both deplores women's lack of access to the material conditions that enable male writing and valorizes their



stylistic inelegance as more richly pluralistic mode of writing than its male counterpart can ever be. The text does not remain on this empirical level of household interruptions, however, but suggests a more radical antithesis to the very nature of writing itself, and Mrs. Flanders's letter seems to exemplify the novel's own project for a new mode of writing. The letter she pens on the beach retains all the contingent, even material circumstances which belong to the time of its writing: the 'blot' of ink where her pen momentarily sticks, as well as her 'tear stain[s]'(5). It thus overturns male canons of objectivity, impersonality and relevance, all of which are presumed necessary to protect the ideality of meaning from the material body of the signifier. This accidental materiality does not simply spoil the neat appearance of the letter, but, more radically, erodes even its syntax: 'slowly welling from the point of her gold nib, pale blue ink dissolved the full stop'(5), and the accidents of falling tears worsen the blot. 'There was nothing for it but to leave...' she has written, in reference to holiday accommodation, and she continues 'ignoring the full stop': 'but mercifully...everything seems satisfactorily arranged'(5). Like the letter, which is later described as 'in pale profusion, dried by the flame, for the blotting-paper's worn to holes and the nib cleft and clotted'(90), her writing does not achieve any sharp definition or precision of meaning. Its content includes 'the cloudy future flocks' of chickens, and even her vigorous son becomes, through the medium of her prose, 'Jacob in the blur of her outline'(90). Describing Mrs. Flanders's letter, the novel's own prose enacts the very qualities of it, as Hermione Lee's subtle, detailed analysis of this passage shows. 'The point of view', she notes, and 'the point in time fluctuates' (the effect of a dissolved full stop!); the syntactic ambiguities, together with 'the haziness of some of the images' oddly juxtaposed, produces 'the blur of outline'. Such characteristic ambiguities give the reader, as she points out, 'all at once the sense of several, habitual scenes in



Mrs. Flanders's life'.<sup>29</sup>

The effect of this rejection of one-dimensional, logical syntax and of shapely narrative progression is to loosen the ligatures of Kristeva's 'thetic subject', which is the locus of choice, judgement, integration, the sustainer of syntax. The thetic is, in more Woolfian terms, a 'policeman' of the subject, who keeps the self 'straight' on the 'continuity of our ways' and saves it from being cast out of civilization into 'chasms'(95). To escape this rigidly linear control is in one sense liberating, in another a dangerous approach to chaos. Writing is by nature linear; one must judge and select, abandoning a kind of 'polymorphous perversity' of signifier. In Jacob's Room the narrator laments the impossibility of totality, of giving full expression to all levels of experience of the whole world. 'To prevent us from being submerged by chaos, nature and society between them have arranged a system of classification...stalls, boxes, amphitheatre, gallery'; hence 'one has to choose one's seat', but to do so limits the scope of one's view, deprives one of the possibility of other views: 'we must choose. Never was there a harsher necessity! or one which entails greater pain, more certain disaster; for wherever I seat myself, I die in exile'(67-68). Thus the text juxtaposes innumerable objects, characters, offering as many glimpses and perspectives of them as possible, though it simultaneously knows that its desire for totality is impossible. Though the novel prefers the sudden impulses, the wayward passions and sentiments of women to the rigid control of an impassive police, it simultaneously acknowledges the necessity of the 'judging' policemen, the need of both forces. Without the Dionysiac 'drums and trumpets - the ecstasy and hubbub of the soul', life is an oppressive suffocation or even death(112); but without some measure of restraint and control, life is a lethal chaos. The novel would thus agree with Roland Barthes that 'the text needs its shadow: this shadow is a bit of ideology, a bit of

representation, a bit of subject',<sup>30</sup> or would acknowledge, in Julia Kristeva's terms, the need of a dialectic of both semiotic impulses and thetic control. This dialectic is figured in a passage which metaphorically evokes 'the life of the elderly' in contrast to the rashness of youth:

What can be more violent than the fling of boughs in a gale, the tree yielding itself all up the trunk, to the very tip of the branch, streaming and shuddering the way the wind blows, yet never flying in dishevelment away?

The corn squirms and abases itself as if preparing to tug itself free from the roots, and yet is tied down.

Why, from the very windows, even in the dusk, you see a swelling run through the street, an aspiration, as with arms outstretched, eyes desiring, mouths agape. And then we peaceably subside. For if the exaltation lasted we should be blown like foam into the air. The stars would shine through us. We should go down the gale in salt drops - as sometimes happens.(119)

Thus the subversions of the semiotic must at last be held in place by a thetic rappel à l'ordre.

It is not only Mrs. Flanders's letters, but those of the women in the novel generally that contain irrelevancies to the ideality of meaning. Florinda's letters also often have 'tear stains'(93); Mother Stuart actually scents her pages with perfume to attain 'a flavour which the English language fails to provide'(92), perhaps thus compensating for a lack of direct linguistic power. While women's letters are soiled, defaced by misspelling and erratic language, Jacob's letters come predictably much closer, in both style and subject, to the phallogocentric ideal: 'long letters about art, morality, and politics'(92). The epistolary contrast between men and women persists throughout the novel: men are lucid, logical, orderly, singleminded; women lack concentration, are erratic, abundant, polyphonic. Even the intellectual Miss Umphelby, Cambridge lecturer in classics, conforms to this pattern: as she saunters along the Backs, she wanders mentally off into irrelevance - 'but if I ever met him [Virgil], what should I wear?' - and her 'other details of men's meeting with women'(40) are the



equivalent of Mrs. Flanders's obtrusive meat and cheese. She falls away from male standards, but the male scholars themselves only adhere to them in a deeply compromised way. In the great Virgilian scholar Erasmus Cowan, there is a fundamental falsity; Virgil himself would be shocked to see his own image 'in his [Cowan's] snug little mirror'(40). Far from being 'the representative of Virgil', this don is rather 'builder, assessor, surveyor', and the narrator thus casts doubt on the quality of scholarship in this sacred citadel of learning. The ideal light of erudition, which ought to be seen 'far out at sea over the tumbling waves'(40), finds itself mired in the smug complacencies, the petty worldly concerns, of the scholars: 'such is the fabric through which the light must shine, if shine it can'(40).

Similar contrasts of men and women are registered in another sanctuary of learning - the British Museum. As in King's College Chapel, women disturb the male scholars, either by overbalancing their books or by trampling across all categories of human knowledge, like Miss Marchmont. She seeks to prove her theory that 'colour is sound', and in her philosophy politics and art - 'Mr. Asquith's Irish policy and Shakespeare' - merge seamlessly together. Whether or not she is a closet revolutionary thinker, with her own early version of Kristeva's 'revolution in poetic language', she appears to Fraser, who destroys his contemporaries' books 'by force of logic', to be merely another example of 'abhorred vagueness'(104-105). Dingy and dishevelled, their rooms 'not very clean'(104), these female readers pursue scholarship despite economic hardship. Julia Hedge bitterly notes the contrast with Jacob: 'what has he got to do except copy out poetry?', for Jacob is 'composedly, unconcernedly' concentrating on his work, while Julia's mind is disturbed into the self-consciousness that A Room of One's Own deplores by her feminist indignation against the Museum. 'One leaf of poetry was pressed flat against another leaf, one burnished letter laid smooth against



another in a density of meaning, a conglomeration of loveliness'(106). Whether it is the probing narrow focus of the male mind or the more diverse, erratic play of female thought that can best attain a 'loveliness' of meaning buried in the millions of pages stored in the Museum is not quite clear. If the troubled or whimsical and vague minds of Julia and Miss Marchmont hardly seem up to the task, the novel's stress on 'density' and 'conglomeration' seems equally to rebuff the penetrating searchlight of the male intellect, suggesting an inert materiality that even the latter cannot penetrate.

If the novel in these various ways calls into question the phallogocentric ideology, exposing, though always in somewhat marginal form, its theoretical weaknesses and practical inhumanities, it none the less faces the embarrassing problem that its own hero is, precisely, a man - a fact the novel curiously finds it necessary to remind us of at various points. In this light, Jacob's encounter as a boy with the sheep's skull may be interpreted as his discovery of his own male sexuality. He finds the skull as he flees, distraught, from the lovers he had by accident encountered: 'stretched entirely rigid, side by side, their faces very red, an enormous man and woman'(7). 'Not far from the lovers lay the old sheep's skull without its jaw'(9), and thus the association of the skull and sexuality is forged. Mrs. Flanders angrily demands that Jacob abandon it - 'Naughty little boy! Now put it down'(8) - and chooses this moment to tell the story of Mr. Curnow's loss of an eye in a gunpowder explosion, 'aware all the time in the depths of her mind of some buried discomfort'(8). This monitory tale might then be seen as a threat of castration whereby the mother attempts to compel her son to abandon a sexuality he has just assumed; certainly the skull causes her an unease deeper and more urgent than its own simple existence justifies. Suddenly alarmed by her 'responsibility and danger', Mrs. Flanders anxiously reflects that her sons have no father: 'There's no man to help with the perambulator'(9). The skull, the eye lost in an

explosion, the mother's premonition of danger, also point to Jacob's death in the war. But the 'sexual' and proleptic functions of the sheep's skull are not, after all, incompatible, for it is precisely Jacob's maleness that 'kills' him in a war which is itself the inevitable consequence of an inhumane masculine ideology.

Because its hero is a man to whom the novel in part desires to pay homage, its feminist critique remains scattered and half-suppressed. In the 1920s Woolf had regarded the male Georgian writers as allies in her crusade against the Edwardians, but, as I noted in the previous chapter, she dissociated herself from them in 'The Leaning Tower' in 1940, rejecting them as 'tower dwellers' who were the product of masculine values. This shift of allegiance is also enacted in the novel. For in the first instance Jacob 'detests' his own age, 'Mr. Masefield... Mr. Bennett. Stuff them into the flame of Marlowe and burn them to cinders...Build a better one'(105-106). But as the feminist Julia Hedge remarks, Jacob also 'looked a little regal and pompous', and Jacob's antagonism to the older generation does in the end seem to be a mere Oedipal contention and not the assertion of a Woolfian difference of view; thus 'Julia Hedge disliked him naturally enough'(106). Jacob's potential complicity with a world he detests had also been signalled earlier in the novel. He is moved to sharp indignation by the intolerable Plumers. 'He was impressionable', the narrator notes, 'but the word is contradicted by the composure with which he hollowed his hand to screen a match. He was a young man of substance'(34). The 'contradiction' the novel here registers is the ambivalence I have tried to focus throughout this essay, but in the course of the text it becomes an increasing acknowledgement of Jacob's maleness. 'For he had grown to be a man'(138), a fact all the women in the novel have to come to terms with, some gloomily, some desperately. Thus the narrator's anxiety that 'a difference of sex' and age may prevent her understanding 'what was in

his mind' (93) proves more deeply significant than it had initially appeared, and points to the 'impossibility', the unresolvable tensions, of Jacob as hero of the book. The emptiness of Jacob at one level reveals the nature of the sign, and at another derives from the tension between male protagonist and proto-feminist novel, which means that Jacob as character cannot in any full sense be fleshed out. The absent centre that Jacob is - a ram's skull rather than rose - exposes simultaneously the hollow illusions of both logocentrism and masculine standards and values.



### CHAPTER III: Mrs. Dalloway

Though Jacob's Room clearly 'marks the beginning of her maturity and her fame' (QB, 2:88), it was indeed only a beginning. In spite of Woolf's ambition to bring forth a literary 'rose', with 'no scaffolding; scarcely a brick to be seen; all crepuscular, but the heart, the passion, humour, everything as bright as fire in the mist' (WD, 23), the result, I have argued, was in fact more of a 'ram's skull'. When she had finished Jacob's Room Woolf noted anxiously in her diary that people would view the book as 'a disconnected rhapsody' (WD, 46). Despite Middleton Murry's warning that the modern novel 'has reached a kind of impasse' (L, 3:107), there is no doubt that Woolf does progress beyond Jacob's Room, and yet along the same lines as that earlier novel. In Mrs. Dalloway she comes close to the view of life which she recommended in 'Modern Fiction': 'not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged' but a 'luminous halo' (CE, 2: 106). While writing Mrs. Dalloway she discussed the aims and problems of her work in correspondence with Jacques Raverat. Himself a painter, Raverat discussed with her the differences between writing and painting, notably the problems posed by the essentially linear nature of the former. He proposed an anti-linear account of the effect of a word, which is like casting a pebble into a pond: 'There are splashes in the outer air in every direction, and under the surface waves that follow one another into dark and forgotten corners.' This phenomenon, he argued, could only be represented by some graphic expedient such as placing the word in the middle of a page and surrounding it radially with associated ideas. Woolf replied that it was precisely this to which she aspired, 'to catch and consolidate and consummate...those splashes of yours'.<sup>1</sup>

I wish to consider the novelistic techniques which made it possible for Woolf to write in her diary that she had exorcised the spell which Murry and others said she had laid herself under with Jacob's Room (WD, 68). One of the conspicuous characteristics of that novel is its

disjointed fragmentariness, and this is overcome in Mrs. Dalloway by the systematic use of 'represented speech' (free indirect speech) which generates an effect of subjective haziness across the whole text, the effect of a 'semi-transparent envelope', by omitting the specific verbs of speaking or thinking that identify the speaker.<sup>2</sup> 'He said he would be there' becomes simply 'He would be there', and the so-called 'stream of consciousness' style or 'indirect interior monologue' based on represented speech allows the novelist's discourse to move freely and smoothly from a character's interior world to the exterior world (or vice versa) in a homogeneous medium, which produces a continuous indeterminacy. Thus if one attends closely to an apparently homogeneous discourse written in the conventional narrative form of the third-person past tense, the subject of any passage is seen to be continuously shifting:

Remember my party, remember my party, said Peter Walsh as he stepped down the street, speaking to himself rhythmically, in time with the flow of the sound, the direct downright sound of Big Ben striking the half-hour. (The leaden circles dissolved in the air.) Oh these parties? he thought; Clarissa's parties. Why does she give these parties? he thought. Not that he blamed her or this effigy of a man in a tail-coat with a carnation in his button-hole coming towards him. Only one person in the world could be as he was, in love. And there he was, this fortunate man, himself, reflected in the plate-glass window of a motor-car manufacturer in Victoria Street. All India lay behind him; plains, mountains; epidemics of cholera; a district twice as big as Ireland; decisions he had come to alone - he, Peter Walsh; who was now really for the first time in his life in love. Clarissa had grown hard, he thought; and a trifle sentimental into the bargain, he suspected, looking at the great motor cars capable of doing - how many miles on how many gallons? For he had a turn for mechanics; had invented a plough in his district, had ordered wheel-barrows from England, but the coolies wouldn't use them, all of which Clarissa knew nothing whatever about.(54-55)

The paragraph opens with Peter echoing Clarissa's cry and proceeds in conventional narrative style (not entirely straightforwardly, however: one notices Peter projecting onto the sound of Big Ben qualities he believes himself to possess - 'direct, downright'). After the parenthetical



refrain describing Big Ben, Peter's interior monologue is presented, in this case in 'direct speech' without quotation marks: 'Why does she give these parties, he thought', but his thoughts and perceptions are now presented in the third-person past tense ('represented speech'). However, at certain moments it becomes unclear whether this is his interior monologue or narrative description. 'Looking at the great motor cars capable of doing...' might be a simple description of his action, but when followed by 'how many miles on how many gallons?' confirms the reader's impression that it is a transcription of Peter's perception. The reader can never be sure precisely whose logic is represented by the immediately following 'For...', a connective used recurrently throughout the book. The sentence is ambivalently poised between a straightforward statement about Peter and the contents of his own consciousness, though as it proceeds it becomes more and more like his own monologue.

Another important formal development in Mrs. Dalloway is what Woolf terms the 'tunnelling process' - 'by which I tell the past by instalments, as I have need of it', she remarked in her diary (WD, 61). During the course of the day, Clarissa, Peter and Sally all delve into their common past, their youthful days at Bourton. The tense system of these scenes from the past is inconsistent. Since the characters' present is given in the past tense as is the case in traditional narrative, their past should presumably be one tense before the past tense, i.e., the pluperfect; but this is not the case in Mrs. Dalloway. After recalling a painful encounter with Clarissa at Bourton, Peter thinks, 'No, no, no! He was not in love with her any more!' (85). The discourse returns to Peter's present, but the tense used in the sentence is the same as that in the remembered scene - the straightforward past tense. From a formal point of view, then, past and present are on the same plane, indistinguishable, as if the past of the character is revived and becomes present. In fact, within Peter's memory-image, though it is initially clear that the scene occurred in the past ('She came into a



room; she stood...'), matters become gradually ambiguous; past and present are fused. In the last few lines the Clarissa who is resurrected from the past is no longer merely Clarissa as a young girl at Bourton, but is the latter day Clarissa as well.

The text presents itself as a homogeneous unity in the conventional narrative guise of third-person past tense, but is in fact radically heterogeneous. Subjects of sentences are continuously shifting, and writing is made 'porous' by Woolf's 'tunnelling process'; one suddenly finds oneself in a 'cave' of the past, for Woolf records in the diary her 'discovery: how I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters' (WD, 60). An early paragraph of the novel epitomizes these characteristics of Woolf's writing:

What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air. How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and yet (for a girl of eighteen as she then was) solemn, feeling as she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen; looking at the flowers, at the trees with the smoke winding off them and the rooks rising, falling; standing and looking until Peter Walsh said, 'Musing among the vegetables?' -was that it? (5).

The 'hinges' of Woolf's transitions don't usually 'squeak' noticeably as they do here. One technical means of 'oiling' them is the conjunction 'for', which as in the above passage often connects slightly different planes of discourse in a very loose, characteristically 'half-logical' way.<sup>3</sup> A profuse use of present participles, another characteristic of Woolf's writing, loosens the binding function of syntax. The effect of the present participles is to attenuate human energy; contrast 'he looked at the flowers' with 'looking at the flowers', where activity is reduced to contemplative stasis. The present participles begin as supplements to a main clause, but generate an autonomous energy of their own; they meander lyrically on until disrupted

by Woolf's brusque comment. Transformed into a present-participle phrase, the action composed of a subject-verb relation is transformed into an adverbial or adjectival phrase, and as a result the sentence gives a sense of the simultaneity of several acts and states. Thus writing can, to a certain extent, go beyond its essential linearity. Woolf diagnosed this effect, somewhat anxiously, in her diary: 'It is a disgrace that I write nothing, or if I write, write sloppily, using nothing but present participles. I find them very useful in my last lap of Mrs. D[alloway]' (WD, 66). 'Looseness' and 'lightness' had been her aim since Jacob's Room (WD, 23), though she was simultaneously aware of their dangers:

I think writing must be formal. The art must be respected... for if one lets the mind run loose it becomes egotistic; personal, which I detest. At the same time the irregular fire must be there; and perhaps to loose it one must begin by being chaotic, but not appear in public like that. (WD, 69)

In the same month she noted that 'the diary writing has greatly helped my style; loosened the ligatures' (WD, 69).

A further fine example of Woolf's transcendence of narrative linearity is the scene in Regent's Park with its aleatory method of composition. As one character casually strolls beside another who had until then been the focus of narrative attention, so the 'fickle' narrative abandons its object to follow the newcomer. A sense of the co-existing currents and eddies in the park is thereby created. In its nimble manoeuvring between individuals, couples and groups the narrative in the Regent's Park episode is behaving curiously like a hostess at a party, and this is no accident. Parks and parties are privileged symbols for Woolf because they are protected enclaves outside the normal run of social life. They are places of a libidinal indulgence that must be repressed elsewhere, mini-Utopias of the senses. Every time Clarissa gives a party she has a 'feeling of being something not herself, and that



everyone was unreal in one way; much more real in another' (187-188). They are 'unreal' in that they are detached from everyday social occupations, but 'more real' because in touch with libidinal energies that the social ego normally represses. So 'it was possible', Clarissa thinks, 'to say things you couldn't say anyhow else....to go much deeper'(188). It is then not surprising that Bourton has the resonance it does in the novel, for with its spacious grounds and continuous social gatherings it is both park and party at once.

Many critics have pointed out the existence of an apparently unified narrative voice in Woolf's writing. Discussing a paragraph of To the Lighthouse in Mimesis, Erich Auerbach asks 'who is speaking in this paragraph?':

And in the ensuing passage the speakers no longer seem to be human beings at all but spirits between heaven and earth, nameless spirits capable of penetrating the depths of the human soul, capable too of knowing something about it, but not of attaining clarity as to what is in process there, with the result that what they report has a doubtful ring....<sup>4</sup>

This unidentifiable narrative voice is achieved by 'represented speech', which suspends the location of the subject somewhere between a given character and the author. This ambiguous 'between-ness' produces at once an intimate internalized tone and a certain indirectness, an uncertainty; the reader is so near to and yet somehow distant from the process of the character's mind. The reader's sense of distance is confused as if one is proceeding in a pervasive mist: 'all crepuscular, but the heart, the passion, humour, everything as bright as fire in the mist'(WD, 23).

There are occasions in which one is confronted by the question 'Who is speaking?' as Auerbach is; for example, in the case of the conjunction 'for' that I mentioned above - who is reasoning? Or again:



She liked those churches, like shapes of grey paper, breasting the stream of the Strand. It was quite different here from Westminster, she thought, getting off at Chancery Lane. It was so serious, it was so busy. In short, she would like to have a profession. She would become a doctor, a farmer, possibly go into Parliament if she found it necessary, all because of the Strand. (150-151)

With the phrase 'in short', one senses the existence of a narrative voice which judges and sums up for the reader, but the discourse quickly glides into the flow of Elizabeth's consciousness. Even if we posit a narrative consciousness to which the discourse of the text should be ascribed and which is responsible for the reasoning of 'for', and the interpretative summing up of 'in short', this narrative consciousness is nonetheless not a unified entity. Whenever we try to pinpoint the locus of the subject, we get lost in a discursive mist:

Dr. Holmes came again. Large, fresh-coloured, handsome, flicking his boots, looking in the glass, he brushed it all aside - headaches, sleeplessness, fears, dreams - nerve symptoms and nothing more, he said...

When the damned fool came again, Septimus refused to see him. Did he indeed? said Dr. Holmes, smiling agreeably. Really he had to give that charming little lady, Mrs. Smith, a friendly push before he could get past her into her husband's bedroom. (101-102)

'The damned fool' is of course Septimus's language, though the whole sentence is on a straightforward narrative plane; 'smiling agreeably', 'a friendly push', are neither simply an objective narrative account nor straightforwardly Dr. Holmes's own point of view. 'Agreeable' and 'friendly' cannot evade the influence of Septimus's condemnatory 'damned fool', which is backed up by the whole context of the passage, and they acquire an ironic edge which satirises Dr. Holmes's self-complacency. Thus the narrative voice is never really a homogeneous unity; it is fractured, wavering, and multiple. So if one posits a narrative consciousness, it is more appropriate to call it 'spirits' in the plural as Auerbach does, rather than J. Hillis Miller's 'omniscient narrator'.<sup>5</sup> In terms of feminist theory, what Woolf tries to achieve in her writing

is a denial of the unified subject which supports all discourse and which is necessarily 'masculine', since the symbolic order is established with the phallus as a fundamental signifier. The narrative consciousness in her writing, if there is indeed one, is a consciousness which has stopped judging, interpreting, explaining; it has no single identity; it is not, in Kristeva's term, a 'thetic subject'. Woolf's writing is a signifying practice without a thetic subject, or if that is impossible (it is strictly impossible, since the symbolic is sustained by the thetic subject), at least minimizing the control of the thetic subject and allowing the other modality of signifying practice - the semiotic realm - as much autonomy as possible.

The extent to which Woolf is playing with the codes and conventions of novelistic interpretation is graphically revealed in the episode in which an aeroplane flies acrobatically across the London sky forming letters of smoke, presumably as an advertisement: 'Only for a moment did they [the letters] lie still; then they moved and melted and were rubbed out up in the sky, and the aeroplane shot further away and again, in a fresh space of sky, began writing a K, and E, a Y perhaps?' (23-24). For that 'key' is doubtless the solution to the hermeneutic riddle of the novel, a transcendental signifier that would make all else fall meaningfully into place. Woolf tantalises us with the possibilities of such a master-key to the text only to withdraw it at once; and as narrator, she thus refuses an 'authoritarian' relation to her own novel.

When writing a short story about Mrs. Dalloway (a rudimentary version of the novel), Woolf commented in her diary:

One must get out of life - yes, that's why I disliked so much the irruption of Sydney - one must become externalised; very, very concentrated all at one point, not having to draw upon the scattered parts of one's character, living in the brain. Sydney comes and I'm Virginia; when I write I'm merely a sensibility. (WD, 48)

Woolf's practice of writing solely as 'a sensibility', of discarding



the self which supports one's identity as a social being, aroused hostile attacks in the 1930s from many critics, especially from the Scrutiny group. Their argument that her work is a mere cultivation of sensibility, a subjectivism to be rejected by the mature adult who has a responsible life in society, is summed up by Leavis's article in 1942.<sup>6</sup> But a more positive assessment of Woolf would rather emphasize that what she does in her writing is to make the unitary 'I' recede and to loosen the ligatures of the unifying and fixing subject so as to produce a style whose characteristics are simultaneity and fluidity. But she never destroys thethetic 'I' completely, which is after all impossible as long as one wants to remain within language (and sane); nor does she ever go as near to shattering language as Joyce does. Her work is not a drastic demolition but a subtle and elegant infraction of syntactic laws in order to undermine the protocols of writing, loosening the relation between subject and object (which thethetic subject sustains), for example, by present-participles or intrusive phrases between subject and object, nouns and verbs, or by breaking up noun-verb or subject-object relations into a mere listing of nouns, and thus disrupting the logical relations which language produces for a human subject by its syntactic order. 'Looseness' is always a term that indicates for Virginia Woolf that her writing is going well: 'I feel as if I had loosed the bonds, pretty completely and could pour everything in. If so - good' (WD, 62). Or again: 'the diary writing has greatly helped my style; loosed the ligatures' (WD, 69). In Kristevan terms, Woolf's texts disperse the unified transcendental subject that underpins male rationality and opens a new possibility for a subjective activity that the traditional (masculine) narrative form fails to contain. Woolf's writing is the subversion of this positionality and tries to adumbrate the area anterior to thethetic (logical, judging, naming) subjectivity which is the agency of action and judgement, to bring in the semiotic, the domain of rhythm, sounds, intonations, colour and shape. In her writing it is well known



that rhythm is always very conspicuously at work. Moreover, colours often come into the foreground, detached from objects themselves. An extreme example of this is such curious intense sketches as 'Blue and Green' and 'Kew Gardens'.

Yellow and black, pink and snow white, shapes of all these colours, men, women, and children were spotted for a second upon the horizon, and then, seeing the breadth of yellow that lay upon the grass, they wavered and sought shade beneath the trees, dissolving like drops of water in the yellow and green atmosphere, staining it faintly with red and blue. (HH, 39)

Virginia Woolf was criticized by contemporaries for her failure to create 'characters' and sternly informed that her literature was 'a mirage entirely unconnected with reality'.<sup>7</sup> What she seeks is a state of human being prior to its consolidation into character or personality. She boldly writes: 'People, like Arnold Bennett, say I can't create, or didn't in Jacob's Room, characters that survive. My answer is - but I leave that to the Nation: it's only the old argument that character is dissipated into shreds now: the old post-Dostoevsky argument' (WD, 57).

How shocking, and yet how wonderful it was to discover that these real things, Sunday luncheons, Sunday walks, country houses, and tablecloths were not entirely real, were indeed half phantoms...What now takes the place of those things I wonder, those real standard things? Men perhaps, should you be a woman; the masculine point of view which governs our lives, which sets the standard, which established Whitaker's Table of Precedency, which has become, I suppose, since the war, half a phantom to many men and women, which soon, one may hope, will be laughed into the dustbin where the phantoms go, the mahogany sideboards and the Landseer prints, Gods and Devils, Hell and so forth, leaving us all with an intoxicating sense of illegitimate freedom... (HH, 44)

If it is this 'reality' which the masculine point of view asserts but which is a mere phantom to women, Woolf clearly denies her ability to write it. 'I daresay it's true, however, that I haven't that "reality" gift. I insubstantise, wilfully to some extent, distrusting reality - its cheapness. But to get further. Have I the power of conveying the true reality?' (WD, 57). 'The true reality' is reality for women; but

Woolf is nervous about the censorship from men and their condemnation. Julia Kristeva writes: 'In women's writing, language seems to be seen from a foreign land...Estranged from language, women are visionaries, dancers who suffer as they speak.'<sup>8</sup> In a foreign land, one becomes naturally more timid about infractions of the law because of the danger of expulsion. So Woolf would never go to extremes as Joyce did, and throughout her career kept a conventional form of narrative writing in the third-person past tense, for 'writing must be formal. The art must be respected' (WD, 69). Woolf's literary affirmation of 'true reality' is thus neither baffling nor obviously disturbing, but is well protected by the apparent formality; her writing subtly undermines the fixed positionality of the subject in language, and thus disrupts the rationality and logic which underpins conventional 'reality'. Her natural descriptions often emit a lateral message about the process of the novel's own constitution, and one such self-reflexive image is her description of a cloudscape above London:

Fixed though they seemed at their posts, at rest in perfect unanimity, nothing could be fresher, freer, more sensitive superficially than the snow-white or gold-kindled surface; to change, to go, to dismantle the solemn assemblage was immediately possible; and in spite of the grave fixity, the accumulated robustness and solidity, now they struck light to the earth, now darkness. (153)

In a similar way, the ordered, apparently formal 'assemblage' of Woolf's own prose may be 'dismantled' in a flash by some disorientating slippage of narrative voice or some 'tunnelling' and mining of the present by the past.

By disrupting linearity and achieving simultaneity, she modifies the status of the subject. For the self which is a unified continuity is only one stage of a 'subject in process/on trial'. The true subject is not 'a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged' - this image clearly suggests linearity and logicality - and is evoked by a more spatial



image: 'a luminous halo'. Though the phrase 'from the beginning of consciousness to the end' implies some kind of temporality, yet the image of 'envelope' does not really coincide with the concept of linear continuity. In the image of 'this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit' with its 'aberration', 'complexity', Woolf offers us a subject which has no simple unity, no clear boundary between itself and the other. ('Envelope' implies some sort of boundary, but it is 'semi-transparent' and therefore it is never a clear-cut distinction between the spirit and the world.) Woolf's idea of self radically denies homogeneous unity: 'she [nature] let creep instincts and desires which are utterly at variance with his main being, so that we are streaked, variegated, all of a mixture'.<sup>9</sup>

In writing Mrs. Dalloway Woolf aspired to be 'only a sensibility', 'not having to draw upon the scattered parts of one's character', and this is actually the mode of being the novel itself presents. Phyllis Rose calls Mrs. Dalloway 'the most schizophrenic of English novels'.<sup>10</sup> There is a parallel between the mode of the subjectivity - loosed from thethetic - which constitutes the stylistic principle of the book, and the state of being in which Clarissa and other characters often find themselves.<sup>11</sup> For Clarissa, it is only by a conscious 'assembling' of her scattered parts into one centre that she can attain a social identity as Clarissa Dalloway:

collecting the whole of her at one point (as she looked into the glass), seeing the delicate pink face of the woman who was that very night to give a party; of Clarissa Dalloway; of herself. (42)

That was her self - pointed; dart-like; definite. That was her self when some effort, some call on her to be herself, drew the parts together. She alone knew how different, how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman who sat in her drawing-room and... had tried to be the same always... (42)

It is not only in her youthful days that she believed in 'a transcendental theory' that 'the unseen part of us, which spreads



wide' (168) might survive. Now as she walks through the London streets she feels herself part of the trees at home, of the house, of people she had never met: 'being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself' (11-12). Whether walking through London, alone in her attic room, or retiring in the middle of the party into a little room to be alone, Clarissa is mostly presented in a state of being where she does not need to 'draw the parts together' in order to become herself. In this context it is curious to note how obsessive Clarissa is about shoes and gloves: 'And her old Uncle William used to say a lady is known by her shoes and her gloves... Gloves and shoes; she had a passion for gloves' (13-14). It is almost as if without this minute 'passionate' attention the extremities of the body cannot be trusted not to fly asunder, as if Clarissa's physical body might literally enact the psychical dissociation she so often experiences!

Clarissa would not say of any one that 'they were this or were that' (10). To her, one fixed identity is not true; it is impossible for her to be one thing and not the other: 'She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through anything; at the same time was outside, looking on'<sup>12</sup> (10). Clarissa is in a state of constant assemblage and dissolving, and as she walks through London she is dispersed into the morning air and spreads among things she sees like a mist. There is no single identity; so 'she would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that' (11), and 'on the ebb and flow of things' (11), her dispersed parts become momentarily fused as she walks, and she becomes rhythm, sound, colour and shape. Even the sense of her body as a whole disappears: 'this body she wore...this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing - nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown' (13). In this state

of being, the words from Cymbeline come to her: 'Fear no more the heat of the sun. Nor the furious winter's rages' - the dirge sung over the apparently dead Imogen. With the self 'dead', freed from the ego-identity, there is no longer death: 'in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home' (11). Similarly, sitting down to mend her silk dress, Clarissa's consciousness unfurls gradually, dissolving 'one centre, one diamond, one woman - her self'; she becomes at one with her manual occupation and its physical rhythm: 'So on a summer's day waves collect, overbalance, and fall; collect and fall; and the whole world seems to be saying "that is all" more and more ponderously, until even the heart in the body which lies in the sun on the beach says too, that is all' (44-45). Once she has let go of the ego, there is only the body, movement, colour, sound and rhythm: 'and the body alone listens to the passing bee; the wave breaking; the dog barking, far away barking and barking'.

It is not only Clarissa's 'self' which is often in abeyance; most of the characters' 'selves' are. It is quite natural to find that Septimus experiences a similar state of mind, for his ego has collapsed into psychosis. Though Clarissa, being perfectly sane, has the power to 'collect the whole of her at one point', to take up a position as a social being, Septimus has lost the power to sustain a unified self. He thinks that his body is 'connected by millions of fibres' with the leaves of trees (26); everything becomes quickening colour and sounds, rising and falling rhythms. The sea-imagery which evoked Clarissa's experience while mending the dress, recurs in the description of Septimus:

Going and coming, beckoning, signalling, so the light and shadow, which now made the wall grey, now the bananas bright yellow, now made the Strand grey, now made the omnibuses bright yellow, seemed to Septimus Warren Smith lying on the sofa in the sitting-room; watching the watery gold glow and fade with the astonishing sensibility of some live creature on the roses, on the wall-paper. Outside the trees dragged their leaves like nets through the depths of the air; the sound of water was in



the room, and through the waves came the voices of birds singing. Every power poured its treasures on his head, and his hand lay there on the back of the sofa, as he had seen his hand lie when he was bathing, floating, on the top of the waves, while far away on shore he heard dogs barking and barking far away. Fear no more, says the heart in the body; fear no more. (153-154)

If this familiar sea-imagery recurs frequently throughout the novel, this is because the sea itself represents some great semiotic chora traversed by natural pulses, rhythms and currents in which one can lapse out into a state of libidinal bliss. But having asserted the Utopian value of the semiotic, the novel then tries to strategically recontain the sensory energies it has released. It does so by giving what the Russian Formalists term a 'motivation of the device', naturalizing and thus 'taming' the semiotic impulses it has unleashed. It does so in two ways. First, by locating the events of the novel shortly after the First World War. After this great and violent disruption of the national life, the simplest routines and objects have a novelty and vividness they would otherwise lack. The disruptive intensity of the novel's sensory perceptions are thus rationalized as the simple expression of a great relief at national survival. Secondly, semiotic intensities are naturalized by being implicitly presented as the effects of a summer heatwave. Under this heat and pressure, sensory impressions become surcharged, almost surreal, as they did in the 'Kew Gardens' passage I cited above. Mrs. Dalloway's Utopian impulse to celebrate the semiotic as an end in itself is thus constrained by a need for naturalistic motivation, just as I argued earlier that Woolf mines the laws of writing from within rather than brazenly flaunting them in the manner of James Joyce.

However, one cannot let one's ego-identity go completely, cannot go on living with the self in abeyance, for this is the dividing line between sanity and insanity. Although she enjoys the other mode of being, Clarissa also 'assembles that diamond shape, that single person'



or what Kristeva terms the 'thetic' subject. But to Clarissa, this ego is essentially masculine, aggressive, possessive, domineering, and her decision not to marry Peter was her rejection of this masculine egotism: 'For in marriage a little licence, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house' (10), but 'with Peter everything had to be shared' (10). Peter's aggressiveness is epitomized by his continuous fondling of a pocket-knife, an assertion of his masculinity which in fact ironically shows up his weakness and insecurity (his attraction for women and Clarissa is that he is 'not altogether manly'(172)). In a male dominated society, when a man demands that a woman share everything as Peter does, it simply means the man forcing his own view on her; there is no mutual sharing. Though his masculine ego might be said to have constituted civilization by its rationality, it at the same time leads humanity to the meaningless destruction of World War by its rapacious aggressiveness, as I argued in the previous chapter. The equation of masculine egotism and destructive aggression is a theme which Woolf will expound strongly in Three Guineas. Clarissa is pierced by an intense joy in life: 'London; this moment of June. For it was the middle of June. The War was over...'(6). Throughout the novel, the impact of World War One is recalled - 'tears and sorrows' (12), 'a miracle thinking of the War' (127), and Septimus is precisely a victim of the War, a case of the 'deferred effects of shell shock'(201). The novel expresses the spiritual bankruptcy to which pure masculinity leads humanity. Septimus 'developed manliness' (95-96) in the war, the effect Mr. Brewer desired for him when he advised football. The wartime emotional turbulence which he had to repress in order to protect himself and survive has destroyed his being. Though he is said to have 'served with great distinction in the War', to his mind, 'in the War itself he had failed'(106).

Thus he is forced into the position of the 'scapegoat' of the masculine society, its imperialism and capitalism, for these are nothing

but political terms for the will to dominate, to reduce differences into homogeneity. Woolf describes the intention of the novel as being 'to criticise the social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense'. (WD, 57) Perry Meisel points out the significance of Septimus's job before the war; he is clerk for 'land and estate agents', 'valuers, in short, of property'.<sup>13</sup> Septimus is one of those 'self-educated men whose education is all learnt from books borrowed from public libraries', 'a border case' (93), with no secure position in this capitalist society. But in spite of his initial successful achievement which wins his employer's trust, Septimus drops out of this capitalist territory and fails to 'colonize himself'.<sup>14</sup>

The incarnation of the capitalist, imperialist spirit is Sir William Bradshaw. He is the champion of the society with his perfect 'sense of proportion' and 'healthy' strong will 'for dominion' and 'for power' (110, 112). 'Sir William not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalised despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion...' (110). The connection between 'the good of society' which 'Proportion' fosters and imperialism and colonization is more explicit in the case of its sister goddess, 'less smiling, more formidable': 'Conversion'. She is even now engaged:

in the heat and sands of India, the mud and swamp of Africa, the purlieus of London, wherever, in short, the climate or the devil tempts men to fall from the true belief which is her own - is even now engaged in dashing down shrines, smashing idols, and setting up in their place her own stern countenance. (110-111)

This 'Conversion' does not operate only on the political, public level; it is also another name for a male egotism which feasts on the wills of women, adoring its own features stamped on the face of them. So Lady Bradshaw is also a victim of this masculine egotism, and Woolf's tone is not so severe towards her. 'Fifteen years ago she had gone



under...only the slow sinking, water-logged, of her will into his'(111). Having lost her spontaneous, living spirit ('Once, long ago, she had caught salmon freely'), now 'the poor lady' had to lie 'to minister to the craving which lit her husband's eye so oilily for dominion, for power'(112). Thus Sir William is a 'master of his own action', 'a law giver', he 'judges', 'rules', and 'inflicts'(163). To him and Lady Bradshaw in her ostrich feathers, 'life is good'; but 'to us', his patients protest, 'life has given no such bounty'(112). It is not simply that they, lacking a sense of proportion, cannot enjoy life; the Bradshaws' comfortable life is made possible only by his domination and suppression of others: imperialism enriches itself by colonizing the territory of others.

The novel's treatment of the mysterious car in which greatness (the Queen or Prime Minister?) passes through London, satirises the whole machinery of the British Empire. It is merely 'rumours'; the car passes 'invisibly, inaudibly'(17). 'But nobody knew whose face had been seen' (17), and yet it is enough to send men, if need be, 'to the cannon's mouth, as their ancestors had done before them'(21). People's piety towards this unreal institution called the British Empire guarantees 'the flowing corn and the manor houses of England'(22). Hugh Whitbread is a harmless but despicable being, who 'had been afloat on the cream of this English society', 'a perfect specimen of the public-school type'(114,82). However, few of the characters are exempt from this charge. Even Peter, who turns a critical eye on the tediousness of high society and regards himself as an outcast (he had been a 'Socialist, in some sense a failure' (56)), shares deep down the same admiration and piety towards the imperial order. He admires the boys' military marching, for they symbolize 'duty, gratitude, fidelity, love of England' (57):



A splendid achievement in its own way, after all, London; the season; civilization. Coming as he did from a respectable Anglo-Indian family which for at least three generations had administered the affairs of a continent (it's strange, he thought, what a sentiment I have about that, disliking India, and empire, and army as he did), there were moments when civilization, even of this sort, seemed dear to him as a personal possession; moments of pride in England; in butlers; chow dogs; girls in their security.(61-62)

This passage reveals his complicity with Imperialism and English high society, which he pretends to despise. Among men he is exceptional in having an element of 'unmanliness', being able to have 'extreme intimacy' with women, being too susceptible (which has been his 'undoing' in Anglo-Indian society), and yet Peter, after all, cannot escape from a sentimental admiration of patriarchal civilization: 'And the doctors and men of business and capable women all going about their business, punctual, alert, robust, seemed to him wholly admirable, good fellows, to whom one would entrust one's life, companions in the art of living, who would see one through. What with one thing and another, the show was really very tolerable'(62). He would never understand the agony of Septimus (as Clarissa does), being fundamentally on the side of Sir William Bradshaw. A further incident reveals Peter's true position. Seeing the ambulance which carries away Septimus, who has just thrown himself out of the window (out of society), Peter admires it as a triumph of civilization: 'the efficiency, the organization, the communal spirit of London'(166). But he manages to check his imagination and empathy with the victim, 'some poor devil', by means of 'a sense of proportion': 'Ah, but thinking became morbid, sentimental', for he knows that his difference of view and standard - unmanliness - 'this susceptibility', 'not weeping at the right time, or laughing either', is his undoing(167). He has been living all these years in the very midst of Imperialism as an Anglo-Indian. Though Peter himself is not free from complicity with this machinery of the British Empire, in spite of his illusion that 'he had escaped! was utterly free' (58), the criticism he aims at Clarissa on

this point is perfectly justified. She has an 'absurd and faithful passion' for the royal family, 'since her people were courtiers once', and her party itself is partly a gesture of pious service to this myth: 'she, too, was going that very night to kindle and illuminate'. (7)

However, she has deep within her something which totally rejects the masculine ego which constitutes this society. This secret space within the self is symbolized by her attic, to which she ascends 'like a nun withdrawing, or a child exploring a tower' (35), and these two images convey the ambivalence of the attic, which is at once a place of deathly renunciation and austerity and yet also a locus of excited new life and discovery. A related ambivalence characterises Woolf's entire treatment of this episode. Clarissa's spiritual trauma is a result of Lady Bruton not inviting her to a lunch party with Richard; the effect is thus out of all proportion to its cause, and a note of satire is introduced, as if this scene were so sensitively significant to Woolf that it could not be introduced without a protective outworks of irony. Yet its centrality to the entire novel is signalled nonetheless: as Clarissa mounts the stairs, it is 'as if she had left a party...had shut the door and gone out and stood alone, a single figure against the appalling night'(35). Thus in a sense, Clarissa 'leaves' her party before she has ever given it, and the attic episode is satirical interlude and spiritual focus-point at once. In the attic Clarissa discards social decorum and pretensions: 'women must put off their rich apparel. At mid-day they must disrobe'(35). Clarissa doffs her yellow feathered hat, which, in the light of the meanings that piece of apparel has already acquired in the novel, is a symbolic gesture. For it was when learning from Hugh Whitbread of his wife's 'internal ailment' that Clarissa had 'felt very sisterly and oddly conscious at the same time of her hat'(8). A spontaneous movement of female solidarity is thus at once undercut by Clarissa's awareness of herself as sexual object of the male gaze ('internal ailment' made her conscious as woman in both directions), and in laying aside the hat



Clarissa may be regarded as renouncing her coquettish self-consciousness in the name of a return to 'sisterliness'. It is as if the sheets of the attic bed, which are 'clean, tight stretched in a broad white band from side to side', symbolize Clarissa's intact hymen. For this attic is the space where she rejects all men, even Richard who is 'the best', 'the most disinterested' (211) among the politicians who doggedly shore up society: 'she could not dispel a virginity preserved through childbirth which clung to her like a sheet'; 'through some contraction of this cold spirit, she had failed him. And then at Constantinople, and again and again'(36). The sexual implications of Clarissa's withdrawal to the attic are complex. On the one hand, it is naturalistically motivated by the fact of her having a bad heart. But, on the other hand, both Clarissa and Richard exploit this biological datum to their own ends. 'Richard insisted, after her illness, that she must sleep undisturbed' (35), adopting the Bradshaw approach - the use of the 'disinterested' authority of medical science to impose constraints on female desire and sexuality. But Clarissa trumps this manoeuvre: 'really she preferred to read of the retreat from Moscow. He knew it', and the final curt sentence carries a stinging humiliation for her husband. This antagonism is repeated a little later. When Richard goes back to bed, he 'as often as not, dropped his hot-water bottle and swore! How she laughed!'(37). This is not just an affectionate chuckle at a spouse's habitual clumsiness; in its very excess it has an edge of malice, as if Clarissa were mocking the feeble substitute (hot-water bottle) to which Richard has recourse for the female bodily warmth she is denying him. The image of Napoleonic retreat through snow symbolizes Clarissa who withdraws 'through some contraction of this cold spirit'. Yet unlike the retreat from the cold snow of Moscow, her retreat does not come nearer to any southern source of warmth. Her retreat will be further and further into the attic: 'Narrower and narrower would her bed be'(35). Her withdrawal and



isolation would become more secret and more complete.

Feminist theorists argue that the fact that the baby girl's first love-object is a body of her own sex, the mother's, is the basis of woman's narcissistic disposition; it will be difficult for later relationships with men to overcome the daughter's loss of her first relationship with the mother's body. In one sense, narcissism simply marginalizes women, reducing them in the male view to a trivial preoccupation with dress and appearance, to personal vanity. But carried to an extreme, such narcissism becomes profoundly threatening to men, opening the dangerous prospect of women attaining mutual sexual satisfaction without any need of the male sex. Peter Walsh, who seeks 'compassion, comprehension, absolution' (64) in womanhood, is constantly confronted by such a total rejection by Clarissa: 'this coldness, this woodenness, something very profound in her...an impenetrability' (68), in spite of 'their exquisite intimacy'(51). The most vivid image of this is the encounter between the newly returned Walsh and Clarissa as she sits mending her dress. There is a mythic resonance as a long absent Ulysses returns to claim a Penelope whose busy weaving has kept away false suitors. But the scene is more complex than this; there is a compacting of mythic roles. Peter is both Ulysses (newly returned) and false suitor (meeting the wife while her true husband, Richard, is away), and Clarissa emphasises his latter role by continuing busily to sew. However, nor is Richard altogether the true possessor, the true husband, of Clarissa. For the ambivalence extends to him, too; for Clarissa often thinks of the extreme joy and excitement which would be hers if she had married Peter: 'If I had married him, this gaiety would have been mine all day!'(52). Thus Clarissa in a sense rejects both of them. When she hears Walsh at the door 'she made to hide her dress, like a virgin protecting chastity' (45), and a subdued note of sexual violation pervades the entire scene. '"And what's all this?" he said, tilting his pen-knife towards her green dress' (46); and her sewing up of the dress thus becomes the restitching

into wholeness of a hymen which Walsh constantly threatens to tear.

Because of this narcissistic disposition, her libido folding in upon herself, Clarissa ultimately rejects all relationships with others. Aware of this cold spirit in herself, she feels that 'I am alone for ever' (53), at the same time acclaiming the importance of 'privacy of the soul'. The dialectic within Clarissa between this cold contracting upon the self and the schizophrenic dispersal I discussed earlier is obliquely recognized by the novel in its far-reaching and suggestive remark about the negligible figure of Mr. Bowley as he watches the crowds waiting at Buckingham Palace: 'Little Mr. Bowley...was sealed with wax over the deeper sources of life, but could be unsealed suddenly, inappropriately, sentimentally, by this sort of thing'(23). And these two impulses are also conveyed in the lines from Cymbeline: 'Fear no more the heat o'the sun/Nor the furious winter's rages'. For it is the psychic 'heat o'the sun' which melts the sealing wax and unleashes the experience of physical dissociation and dispersal. While Clarissa's attic is clearly an allusion to the attic which contains Bertha Mason in Jane Eyre, Woolf has reversed the values traditionally associated with the 'mad woman in the attic'. For Bertha's attic is a place of tropical heat and sexuality, of buried physical violence, while Clarissa's has the chill and disembodied atmosphere of a mortuary.

Yet Clarissa can occasionally overcome her 'contraction of this cold spirit' in her relationship with women. She yields to 'the charm of a woman, not a girl' (namely, the mother). This experience is explicitly sexual:<sup>15</sup>

It was a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush which one tried to check and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion, and rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which split its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores. Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed. But the close withdrew; the hard softened.(36)



The culmination of these experiences with women, the one in which Clarissa experienced 'the most exquisite moment of her whole life' (40), is the kiss with Sally Seton. Clarissa acclaims this love-relationship with Sally for its 'purity' and 'integrity' (38), which are impossible in a relationship with a man, which always becomes domination by the man over the woman. Relationships with men - especially their culmination in marriage - are thus a menace to the freedom of a woman, a kind of delayed repetition of the girl's transition from an active mother attachment to mere mother-identification and the passive aim of father-attachment which securely fixes a woman as a castrated being in patriarchal society.<sup>16</sup> Marriage breaks up the bond between women to prevent them from uniting themselves to form a republic of women and to conform them to the masculine will. Hence 'a sense of being in league together, a presentiment of something that was bound to part them (they spoke of marriage always as a catastrophe), which led to this chivalry, this protected feeling'(39).

The old woman opposite Clarissa's window is a mirror image of herself in her attic with 'the bed and Baron Marbot and the candle half-burnt'(36-37). She is a symbol of both independence and isolation maintained in patriarchal society. Moreover, she lives up to the demands of Woolf's major feminist tract because she has 'A Room of [Her] Own'. 'It was fascinating, with people still laughing and shouting in the drawing-room, to watch that old woman, quite quietly, going to bed alone'(204). This mirror image endows Clarissa with the strength to resist the colonization of herself by the surrounding world, to remain immune from 'the contagion of the world's slow stain',<sup>17</sup> even though Clarissa herself fritters her time away, 'lunching, dining, giving these incessant parties of hers, talking nonsense, saying things she didn't mean, blunting the edge of her mind, losing her discrimination'(87). The characters are continually criticizing and 'cutting up' each other in the book, but the text implies that there may exist a strong bond between

women in spite of differences and hostility:

Nevertheless her inquiry, 'How's Clarissa?' was well known by women infallibly to be a signal from a well-wisher, from an almost silent companion, whose utterances (half a dozen perhaps in the course of a lifetime) signified recognition of some feminine comradeship which went beneath masculine lunch parties and united Lady Bruton and Mrs. Dalloway, who seldom met, and appeared when they did meet indifferent and even hostile, in a singular bond. (117)

There is a bond even between such profoundly different types as Clarissa and Miss Kilman, for her relationship to the latter, however hostile, has a fierce intensity unparalleled in any of her relationships with men: 'she hated her: she loved her'(192).

The problem of woman is to assert a female specificity as difference and to open up space for this difference in the masculine structure of society. But this is not to be achieved simply by the assertion of the comradeship of women within patriarchal society; it involves, rather, the question of the subject. Having remained close to the maternal body in spite of the repression which society forces upon her, the girl or woman inscribes herself naturally within the semiotic, in touch with what Kristeva terms the 'spasmodic force' of the repressed. The woman's task is then to affirm this force, to find the practices appropriate to it, but this will not be a matter of its defining a separate, substantive symbolic of its own. It will rather, Kristeva writes, 'at best be enacted as a moment inherent in the rejection in the process of the ruptures, of the rhythmic breaks. Insofar as she has a specificity of her own, a woman finds it in asociality, in the violation of communal conventions, in a sort of a-symbolic singularity'.<sup>18</sup> Menaced equally by paternal paranoia and the schizophrenia of the mother, the daughter must maintain herself in a difficult equilibrium between the two.

In order to avoid madness, silence, and thus further marginalization, women must somehow keep a hold on the symbolic too. As if in repetition and reinforcement of the mirror phase - the threshold of



formation of the unitary ego - Clarissa needs her own reflection: 'the delicate pink face of the woman...of Clarissa Dalloway; of herself'(42). By means of this specular image she can sustain her self-hood; otherwise she is fragmented - 'different' and 'incompatible' 'parts'. So Clarissa 'assembles' her self 'when some effort, some call on her self' constrains her; she submits to the laws of the Father, repressing the maternal body. Clarissa is conscious of her lack of 'something central which permeated' (36), and this is the maternal body which she has to repress in order to become a subject in the symbolic, a repression which is not Clarissa's alone, but is the necessary condition for all human beings to become subjects. Because of this denial of the maternal body and her own body, 'there was an emptiness about the heart of life; an attic room' (35) to which she austerey withdraws 'like a nun'. Sally, who more fully owns her body, is quick to detect this lack in Clarissa: 'But - did Peter understand? - she lacked something' (207). The novel stresses this withdrawal from the body in several ways. Clarissa had 'grown very white since her illness' (6); she is thus the mere ghost of a woman, cut away by physical infirmity from the energies of bodily life. There is, moreover, 'a touch of the bird about her, of the jay, blue-green, light, vivacious' (6); such energy as she retains is light and ethereal, more spiritual than physical. And, finally, she is in her fifties, cut off by the fact of menopause from the fertile inner biological processes of ovulation and menstruation.

The most positive representation of the body in the novel is the young Sally Seton, who 'forgot her sponge, and ran along the passage naked'(38). Sally's fascination for Clarissa was 'a sort of abandonment' (37), that is, her different relationship to her own body. Without misgivings about the body, Sally teaches Clarissa about sex; she speaks of sexual matters in front of men; she shocks others by running along the passage naked. She confidently asserts herself as a woman, afraid of

nothing: 'as if she could say anything, do anything'(37). Not that her feminist boldness goes unpunished, however; Hugh Whitbread's kiss is an act of sexual violence, a rape on a miniature scale of a woman who has dared argue that her sex should have the vote. But to our and Clarissa's disappointment, the apparently fearless Sally has married a capitalist millionaire, and is now the mother of five sons. Maternity is the only female identity which is valorized and recognized by patriarchy; only as a mother is a woman allowed to have her sexuality as difference, to own her body and social place. Thus the novel's arch-rebel becomes a sober conformist, 'Lady Rossiter', as Clarissa becomes 'Mrs. Dalloway' but in a different way.

Repressing the body, Clarissa is given a place in the symbolic order which is constructed around the Name-of-the-Father:

this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing - nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway. (13)

She is 'not even Clarissa', since once subdued to the laws of the father, a woman is next handed over to another man, the husband, as commodity in the structure of patriarchal exchange relations. Clarissa becomes a mere role - 'Mrs. Richard Dalloway'; this is the only possible place for her in the system of patriarchy. Throughout the novel, Clarissa's mother is curiously repressed. Her father, Justin Parry, is always prominent in her memories, but her mother never comes into the foreground. Only once, at the party, does a guest exclaim that Clarissa looks that night 'so like her mother': 'And really Clarissa's eyes filled with tears' (193); but this brief 'return' of her mother is instantly cancelled by her duty as hostess of patriarchy.<sup>19</sup> This repression of the mother is also a denial of the maternal in herself: 'unmaternal as she was'(209). Women have to be the daughters of their fathers, not their



mothers. Childbirth can no more rupture her hymen outwards than the phallus could rupture it inwards; she retains 'a virginity preserved through childbirth'(36). Clarissa cannot move from girlhood to full womanhood, and is constantly defensive about her own maternity. Even Peter Walsh notices the over-emphasis, the 'histrionic' manner, in which she declares 'Here is my Elizabeth' (53), and he later reflects that 'probably she [Elizabeth] doesn't get on with Clarissa'(63). Seeing Clarissa, Walsh notes that 'they [women] attach themselves to places; and their fathers - a woman's always proud of her father'(62). In 'Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street' Clarissa recalls 'A happy childhood - and it was not to his daughters only that Justin Parry had seemed a fine fellow...'.<sup>20</sup> Breaking away from the mother, Clarissa submits herself to the authority of the father, accepts the role prescribed by his laws, becoming 'the perfect hostess'(9). Thus she lets her duty as hostess smother her emotion towards her mother. And this repudiation of the mother is repeated in Elizabeth: '"one can see they are devoted to each other." She could feel it by the way Elizabeth went to her father'(213).

Though this severing from the maternal is the most painful loss the human subject endures, and for the rest of life its overcoming is his/her desire, the risk of fusing with the mother is shown in Peter's dream in Regent's Park. It is noteworthy that Peter falls asleep beside an elderly nurse who 'resumed her knitting' as he began snoring(63). Here is a female knitter more reassuring than the formidable Clarissa-Penelope. Peter's dream of the solitary traveller evokes some ultimate principle of womanliness which will 'shower down from her magnificent hands, compassion, comprehension, absolution'(64). Seeking fusion with the maternal in Clarissa, Peter always finds himself repelled by her, confronting a 'coldness' or 'impenetrability' in her, in spite of her being 'purely feminine'(84). He therefore thinks 'rather let me walk straight on to this great figure, who will, with a toss of her head,

mount me on her streamers and let me blow to nothingness with the rest'(64). This fusion with the maternal is thus an instantaneous dispersal of the human subject. But the passage is deeply ambivalent because the novel recognizes that Peter is invoking an ideology of femininity in order to avoid contact with the real woman. Hence it speaks of 'the visions which ceaselessly float up, pace beside, put their faces in front of, the actual thing', and hence the satirical tone, as when the Sirens are 'lolloping away on the green sea waves' (emphasis added). At the same time, however, even this ideological stereotype of the feminine does answer to certain deep-seated needs of the human subject, and the sea imagery does nonetheless relate to those more Utopian visions of the sea as a great pulsing semiotic chora which I discussed earlier.

The voice of the 'battered woman' singing opposite the tube station is precisely the voice of the mother, issuing from 'a mere hole in the earth' (91) (the woman, the mother is always a void, a hole in discourse - as the unconscious, the unrepresentable): 'so rude a mouth, a mere hole in the earth, muddy too, matted with root fibres and tangled grasses', an image irresistably suggesting the female genitals. This singing voice 'bubble[s] up without direction, vigour, beginning or end', and 'with an absence of all human meaning into ee um fah um so | foo swee too eem oo' (90). A mere rhythmic babble of phonemes, this 'old bubbling, burbling song' of the pre-symbolic becomes something like the very principle of evolution; it has endured 'through all ages - when the pavement was grass, when it was swamp, through the age of tusk and mammoth'. The ancient woman therefore offers an alternative, 'feminist' view of evolution to set against the patriarchal social Darwinism of a Sir William Bradshaw, whereby only the fittest (or those with a 'sense of proportion') survive. Septimus sees Holmes and Bradshaw as 'the brute with the red nostrils' (162), an allusion to the Tennysonian view of the evolutionary process as 'nature red in tooth and claw'.



Just as the broken syllables of the old woman's song escape the lexical and syntactic grids of the symbolic order, so she has no place within society, but wanders freely as a tramp. Clarissa, in contrast, is a perfect hostess; she gives a party for the good of her husband's career, escorts the Prime Minister with 'an exquisite cordiality' (191), and thus she preserves her place in this patriarchal structure. But this complicity with patriarchy arouses an intense hostility in Miss Kilman who has been 'cheated' (136) by the male social order. Kilman is a 'phallic woman'<sup>21</sup> who identifies herself with the Father, denying her femaleness and 'becoming' a man herself. Hence Clarissa can only conceive of Kilman's hated existence as a violent phallic penetration and scraping of the delicate interior membranes of her body: 'It rasped her, though, to have stirring about in her this brutal monster! to hear twigs cracking and feel hooves planted down in the depths of that leaf-encumbered forest, the soul...[it] had power to make her feel scraped, hurt in her spine; gave her physical pain'(15). Kilman does not 'dress to please', and hates Clarissa with her feminine delicacy and fashionableness: 'the most worthless of all classes'(136). But because of her inferior class-position, Kilman has had to adopt the most aggressive masculine values in order to earn and secure a social niche for herself. She is thus dominated by egotism and the male spirit of conversion, and even her love for Elizabeth has become a rapacious desire for possession. In attempting to conform to the mores of male society, Kilman has had to repress the maternal and the body, just as Clarissa did.

'It was the flesh that she must control'(141). She must subjugate 'her unlovable body', which people could not bear to see and the opposite sex would never desire (142), and she therefore desperately resorts to religion for this, 'for the light in the Abbey was bodiless' (147); 'to aspire above the vanities, the desires, the commodities, to rid herself

both of hatred and of love'. Her insatiable pleasure in eating betrays the fact that she cannot yet control the body, and it is her powerful physical existence that strikes people: 'her largeness, robustness and power'(148). This superabundant physicality takes the form of a powerful smell about which, however, the novel remains coy. As Elizabeth and Kilman have tea together, the former defers to the latter's wish for her to remain, but nonetheless reflects that 'it was rather stuffy in here'(145). When Elizabeth finally does escape, 'she was delighted to be free. The fresh air was so delicious. It had been so stuffy in the Army and Navy Stores'(149). Earlier Clarissa thinks of Kilman 'mewed in a stuffy bedroom' (14), and when she reflects that 'year in year out she wore that coat; she perspired; she was never in the room five minutes without making you feel her superiority', this final noun is not quite what we were expecting! It is precisely the effort to repress the body that turns it sour and rancid, for Kilman's disgusting odour is in stark contrast to the healthy and vital smell of Richard Dalloway: 'when he came into the room he smelt of stables'(208). The heavy stress on Kilman's perspiration reveals her as a principle of heat in contrast to Clarissa as the principle of ice and austerity, and this may lend another meaning to Clarissa's desire to 'fear no more the heat o'the sun'.

'With all this luxury going on, what hope was there for a better state of things? Instead of lying on a sofa...she should have been in a factory; behind a counter; Mrs. Dalloway and all the other fine ladies!'(137). Kilman's denunciation of Clarissa is perfectly justified, and Peter also criticizes her, protected as she is by her 'Conservative husband', for 'sitting all the time', 'playing about', 'going to parties' (46); she is little better than Hugh Whitbread who has been 'afloat on the cream of English society for fifty-five years' (114), is 'at heart a snob'(209). By making Kilman so distasteful and aggressive, however, the novel encourages us to discount her attack on Clarissa's complicity with patriarchy, the contradiction that she depends on an imperialistic



society to afford the material conditions for the possibility of those values - 'the privacy of the soul' (140) - which that society at the same time negates. This is the very contradiction which Raymond Williams has noted of Bloomsbury in general: that the Bloomsbury intellectuals were culturally superior to and contemptuous of the bourgeoisie to whom they were at the same time mere administrative functionaries.<sup>22</sup> Clarissa's cold and distant attitude to Sally's husband as self-made man and industrial capitalist further attests this distaste for the bourgeoisie, as does the novel's hostility to Sir William Bradshaw as a member of the ideological thought-police of the capitalist order. Bradshaw in turn is suspicious, even aggressive towards 'cultivated people'(108). This contradiction in Clarissa cannot be evaded: her stoical, sometimes almost existential anguish, and her creative energy (in giving a party 'for the sake of offering' (135), getting people together), on the one hand; her role as snobbish and superficial hostess of high society, surrounded by luxury, idling away her time with endless parties, on the other. This was Woolf's worry too: 'the doubtful point is, I think, the character of Mrs. Dalloway. It may be too stiff, too glittering and tinsely. But then I can bring innumerable other characters to her support'(WD, 61). Of Kilman, Clarissa thinks: she 'hated her' and 'she loved her', 'It was enemies one wanted, not friends'(192). Because of the 'heavy, ugly, commonplace' nature of the accuser, Woolf can make Clarissa's defence more 'convincing' than it could otherwise have been.

But if Clarissa and Miss Kilman are starkly opposed, the novel does nonetheless propose a mediation of their antagonistic qualities in Lady Bruton whom Clarissa in a sense envies. Like Kilman, Lady Bruton is a physically powerful, emphatically phallic woman. She is 'a strong martial woman' (120) with a 'ramrod bearing', who 'could have worn the helmet and shot the arrow, could have led troops to attack' (198), thus contrasting with the physical slightness and femininity of Clarissa. But

like Clarissa, Lady Bruton belongs to the upper echelons of society and, unlike Miss Kilman, she has little intellect, being wholly dependent on Hugh Whitbread and Richard Dalloway to help her compose a letter to The Times: 'Debarred by her sex, and some truancy, too, of the logical faculty (she found it impossible to write a letter to the Times)'(198). Lady Bruton, however, belongs decisively to the past. 'She derived from the eighteenth century', reflects Peter (191), 'She was all right': thus she is exempt from his criticisms of English Imperialism. As an aristocrat, it is appropriate that the positive values associated with the body should attach to her, since the aristocracy as a class is defined by its blood and breeding. These values have thus migrated downwards socially, attaching themselves to the lower classes represented by Kilman and becoming negative and dystopian in the process. It is Kilman's fusion of mind and body that makes her, politically, so dangerous in the novel, for she incarnates two of the most potent middle class images of social subversiveness. On the one hand, she is the menacing Utopianist, constructing cerebral schemes for the wholesale renovation of society. Hence her enthusiasm for post-revolutionary Russia (she 'would do anything for the Russians'(14)), which places her in the 'Jacobin' tradition first denounced in the name of piecemeal, 'organic' reform by Edmund Burke. Sally and Clarissa were enthusiastic over William Morris in their teens - 'They meant to found a society to abolish private property' (38) - and such youthful infatuations, the novel implies, display an admirable innocence and idealism. Kilman falls out of favour because she has poor enough taste to be still adhering to socialist principles in her forties. But Kilman is not only an abstract revolutionary, she also represents the middle-class fear of the lower orders as 'mob', as a pre-rational violent body clamouring for gratification and violently overturning social constraints - hence the stress on Kilman's voracity: her wolfing down of eclairs, her desire for the sensory pleasures she has been deprived of. But if in uniting these



two images of revolution Kilman becomes extraordinarily formidable, she is also at the same time rendered powerless. Mind and body are in grave contradiction; each tugs in opposite directions, and their overall effect is to leave Kilman static and impotent in the middle. Thus Clarissa finally defeats Kilman because the 'abducted' Elizabeth returns to the bosom of her family. 'Mrs. Dalloway had triumphed. Elizabeth had gone'(146).

Love and religion! thought Clarissa, going back into the drawing-room, tingling all over. How detestable, how detestable they are!...The cruellest things in the world, she thought, seeing them clumsy, hot, domineering, hypocritical, eavesdropping, jealous, infinitely cruel and unscrupulous, dressed in mackintosh coat, on the landing; love and religion. Had she ever tried to convert any one herself? Did she not wish everybody merely to be themselves? And she watched out of the window the old lady opposite climbing upstairs...There was something solemn in it - but love and religion would destroy that, whatever it was, the privacy of the soul. The odious Kilman would destroy it. Yet it was a sight that made her want to cry. (139-140)

Thus Clarissa defends herself for caring more for her roses than the Armenians: 'And people would say, "Clarissa...is spoilt."...Hunted out of existence, maimed, frozen, the victims of cruelty and injustice...no, she could feel nothing for the Albanians, or was it the Armenians? but she loved her roses (didn't that help the Armenians?)'(133). Clarissa asserts this in contrast to Miss Kilman who 'would do anything for the Russians, starved herself for the Austrians, but in private inflicted positive torture, so insensitive was she, dressed in a green mackintosh coat'(14). Though Clarissa's argument is little more than a caricature, her point is that callousness of feeling causes social injustice and political oppression, and that it is therefore useless to react to injustice with the very kind of insensitivity which has brought it into being in the first place. She totally rejects politics as incompetent; the problem of 'frumps, the most dejected of miseries sitting on doorsteps...can't be dealt with, she felt positive, by Acts of Parliament

for that very reason: they love life'(6). However, a world groaning under injustice and oppression can hardly wait for a total change of the political system brought about simply by loving roses. It might be said that Mrs. Dalloway is such a 'pure' revolutionary that she ends up being reactionary. Though she feels the need for a wholesale transformation of social values, she suspects the practical means of social change (political action) as themselves bearing the dominative values of the system they are attacking. To attempt to transform society is, for Clarissa, to be complicit with its worst values. Even socialism is no more than a disguise for the tyrannical spirit of 'conversion', who 'shrouds herself in white and walks penitentially disguised as brotherly love through factories and parliaments; offers help, but desires power'(111). This view is a further consequence of the Romantic suspicion of abstract political thought, and its effect is to leave Clarissa in a state of total political quiescence.

But the novel does not ignore the contradiction in Clarissa's views about society. Returning from her expedition to the florist, she thinks as she enters the house:

how moments like this are buds on the tree of life, flowers of darkness they are, she thought (as if some lovely rose had blossomed for her eyes only); not for a moment did she believe in God; but all the more, she thought, taking up the pad, one must repay in daily life to servants, yes, to dogs and canaries, above all to Richard her husband, who was the foundation of it...one must pay back from this secret deposit of exquisite moments, she thought. (33)

But Clarissa's 'exquisite moments', which depend entirely on her husband and the whole imperialist society, are ironized by being shaken the very next instant by the news that Lady Bruton had asked Richard to lunch without her. Earlier in the novel Mrs. Dempster had already been used to satirise Clarissa's arguments about 'roses'. Mrs. Dempster thinks that life has been bitter, and she had given to it 'roses; figure; her feet too': 'Roses, she thought sardonically. All trash, m'dear. For



really, what with eating, drinking, and mating, the bad days and good, life had been no mere matter of roses'(31).

Septimus is another victim of patriarchy, its 'scapegoat'(29). He had left home as a boy 'because of his mother; she lied' (93-94), and educated himself borrowing books from public libraries. His growth is thus a process of breaking away from the Mother and identification with and assimilation of the locus of the Father. He worked for the Sibleys and Arrowsmith: auctioneers, valuers, and estate agents, thus serving the capitalist order, and finally he went to War, in which he 'developed manliness' (95-96), the lack of which had previously been the only unsatisfactory aspect of him. But in this final stage of his cultivation of 'masculinity' Septimus has broken down: 'In the War itself he had failed'(106). His obsession that 'one must be scientific' represents the imperative toward rationality of the patriarchal civilization. But he at last finds that 'He could reason; he could read...he could add up his bill', but he could not feel; 'his brain was perfect; it must be the fault of the world then - that he could not feel'(98). He denounces himself for his 'sin' of being unable to feel, even about the death of his dear friend Evans.

Like Clarissa and Kilman, Septimus cannot come to terms with the body. 'His body was macerated until only the nerve fibres were left. It was spread like a veil upon a rock'(76). He loathes all corporeality in human beings - 'the putting on of clothes, the getting of children, the sordidity of the mouth and the belly!' (98) - and rejects his wife's wish to have a son, because 'the business of copulation was filth to him before the end'(99). But if the refusal to procreate is in one sense a refusal of the body, it is also a rebellion against the symbolic order, for Septimus is refusing to take the final step into the patriarchal order by becoming a father himself. His sense of being alone and helpless ('They had lost him!...to be alone for ever....He was alone, exposed on this bleak eminence, stretched out'(159-160). is analogous to

the fear of the infant bereft of the mother: 'naked', 'defenceless' (113). He wishes to retrieve the mother, which the Name-of-the-Father prohibits, and Septimus bitterly resents the enforcement of this prohibition. The Father as lawgiver is represented in the novel by Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw. "'Must", "must", why "must"? What power had Bradshaw over him? "What right has Bradshaw to say 'must' to me?" he demanded?' (162); Bradshaw and Holmes are 'judges'; they 'rule' and 'inflict'(163).

With the breakdown of the symbolic and the return of the repressed, Septimus loses the capacity for communication. He 'talks to himself' (77), hears voices which do not exist, hears birds speak in Greek. Communication - the exchange of signs - is made possible only within the symbolic order, through the split in the subject which is established by the intervention of the phallus in the unity with the mother. In Septimus's madness, the division between signifier and signified is no longer clear; words and things are confused, imagination and reality no longer distinguishable: 'And the leaves being connected by millions of fibres with his own body, there on the seat, fanned it up and down; when the branch stretched he, too, made that statement'(26). He can no longer sustain a stable, fixed self - 'he was not Septimus now' (27, 73) - his body, the world, the word, are all fusing, intersecting and traversing each other. Thus to him inner meaning, truth, seems to emerge out of the world at any moment. The word is no longer a mere empty sign but an absolute reality through which truth shines with no dividing bar between signified and signifier: 'The word "time" split its husk; poured its riches over him; and from his lips fell like shells, like shavings from a plane, without his making them, hard, white, imperishable, words, and flew to attach themselves to their places in an ode to Time; an immortal ode to Time'(78).

Of what Septimus tells Rezia to write down, 'some things were



very beautiful; others sheer nonsense'(154). Septimus had always been interested in poetry, and now, released from the constraints of the symbolic order, he emerges as a paradigm of the Symbolist poet in a utilitarian society. Septimus's sense of Nature as about to yield a mystic revelation parallels that of Baudelaire's correspondances, where

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers  
 Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;  
 L'homme y passe travers de forêts de symboles  
 Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.<sup>23</sup>

For Septimus too 'Nature signified by some laughing hint...her determination to show...always beautifully, and standing close up to breathe through her hollowed hands Shakespeare's words, her meaning'(154). Septimus can be extremely happy when he escapes the 'forcing' of souls (203) by 'human nature' - 'the repulsive brute, with the blood-red nostrils'(102).

To watch a leaf quivering in the rush of air was an exquisite joy. Up in the sky swallows swooping, swerving, flinging themselves in and out, round and round, yet always with perfect control as if elastics held them; and the flies rising and falling; and the sun spotting now this leaf, now that, in mockery, dazzling it with soft gold in pure good temper; and now and again some chime (it might be a motor horn) tinkling divinely on the grass stalks - all of this, calm and reasonable as it was, made out of ordinary things as it was, was the truth now; beauty was everywhere. (77-78)

In this state Septimus enjoys colours, rhythms, sounds, with extreme intensity as the thetic subject is dissolved into the semiotic chora it had formerly so severely repressed.<sup>24</sup>

However, the society which the Name-of-the-Father upholds does not leave one alone: it drives a wedge between subject and the maternal body, between signifier and signified. Clarissa understands Septimus's suicide: 'Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evades them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death'(202). In psychoanalytic terms,

the 'embrace' which Septimus aimed at through death may be regarded as an embrace with the Mother. It is impossible to reach the 'centre' because of the split in the subject simultaneous with the entry of the subject into the symbolic order as it breaks away from the mother's body. It is this embrace which Clarissa sometimes experiences for a moment with women: jouissance<sup>25</sup> which 'gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores', when she saw 'an illumination' - 'an inner meaning almost expressed' (36).

What is crucial is not how Clarissa deciphers Septimus's suicide, but that she deciphers it, that a relation is crucially established between the two figures. If Septimus does indeed 'embrace' the mother in death, it is because he now in a sense has a 'mother' - Clarissa - who acknowledges relationship to him: 'She felt somehow very like him (204). The novel is deeply marked by the images of the absent son and the grieving mother, and in this respect is a development of the closing pages of Jacob's Room. Early in the novel Clarissa thinks of Mrs. Foxcroft at the Embassy 'eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed and now the old Manor House must go to a cousin; or Lady Bexborough who opened a bazaar, they said, with the telegram in her hand, John, her favourite, killed' (7). And if Clarissa's thoughts revert several times to Lady Bexborough, this is no surprise: news of the son's death intrudes as brutally into her bazaar as news of Septimus's does into Clarissa's party. The figures of bereaved mother and absent son also haunt Peter Walsh's dreams; he has a vision of 'an elderly woman who seems...to seek, over the desert, a lost son; to search for a rider destroyed; to be the figure of the mother whose sons have been killed in the battles of the world' (65). Thus when Clarissa 'understands' Septimus's suicide, she seems momentarily to assume the guise of bereaved mother.

Though Septimus perished under the pressure of a patriarchal



society, Clarissa 'had escaped' by submitting herself to the Law and thus instead obtaining protection:

Then....there was the terror; the overwhelming incapacity, one's parents giving it into one's hands, this life, to be lived to the end, to be walked with serenely; there was in the depths of her heart an awful fear. Even now, quite often if Richard had not been there reading the Times...she must have perished. She had escaped. But that young man had killed himself.(203)

Clarissa herself admits her impurity and contradictoriness: 'it was her disaster - her disgrace....She had schemed; she had pilfered....She had wanted success, Lady Bexborough and the rest of it' (203). The old woman in the house opposite who fascinates Clarissa affirms the imperishable existence of the soul, which entirely escapes the social world. She represents a woman's space (a room of one's own) which is indifferent to and independent of male-dominated society. By means of this mirror image of herself ('the old lady stared straight at her!')(204)), Clarissa can secure this female space within herself.

Clarissa survives despite or perhaps because of her contradiction, and Septimus vicariously represents the risk of a total rejection of patriarchal law, and perishes. If in one sense Septimus is the absent son, united with the mother only in the Pyrrhic moment of death, in another sense he is a surrogate for Clarissa, committing suicide on her behalf. In Woolf's original plan Clarissa was herself to die,<sup>26</sup> and the invention of Septimus is thus a defensive 'splitting', whereby Clarissa's most dangerous impulses are projected into another figure who can then vicariously die for her: to this degree Septimus and Clarissa are one composite character. The tensions in Clarissa's character worried Woolf, and this internal split - that aspect of Clarissa which makes her feel 'somehow very like him [Septimus]' and the snobbish, 'glittering and tinsely' (WD, 61) aspect of her - reveals that the problem of woman is the problem of subjectivity and also the problem of writing. How is it possible to recognize and valorize the position of woman as difference?

There are two obvious ways open to feminists: to deny the difference of woman in order to be admitted as a subject in the symbolic order, thus becoming a token man. Or to refuse the symbolic altogether, and risk being even more marginalized than before, or worse, expelled as mad from society. These alternatives are represented by Kilman and Septimus, in a sense; Clarissa must negotiate a precarious balance between them: either way a woman has to take a terrible risk. Clarissa saw her sister Sylvia, 'on the verge of life, the most gifted of them', killed by a falling tree - 'all Justin Parry's fault' (87). The Father kills the most gifted girl by means of the Phallus (the tree). So Clarissa must be wary: 'her notion being that the Gods, who never lost a chance of hurting, thwarting and spoiling human lives, were seriously put out if, all the same, you behaved like a lady' (87), and we can rewrite 'gods' here as 'men'. Though not herself as gifted as Sylvia, who had to be crushed by the Father, Clarissa treads carefully. 'she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day' (11). Thus she has protected herself by behaving 'like a lady', serving as 'a perfect hostess' in the established social structure of patriarchy.

If a woman wants to avoid total submission to the Law of the Father, to avoid gaining a place in the symbolic at the price of negating woman's difference altogether, but also desires to avoid expulsion from the symbolic into complete silence, then she can only oscillate between these two positions, living a tension which must not be resolved in either of the two directions. She must reject the frozen identity of the subject, but must not relinquish subject-hood altogether. This dialectic between stasis and rupture is precisely what the novel's style achieves, both in the local, moment-by-moment texture of the writing and in certain self-reflexive images which speak of its own ambitions, as in the description of a cloudscape: 'Fixed though they seem at their posts...nothing could be fresher, freer, more sensitive...to change, to go, to dismantle the



solemn assemblage was immediately possible'(153).

Clarissa often experiences this moment of suspense between stasis and rupture: 'How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning...chill and sharp and yet...solemn, feeling as she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen'(5). And this momentary pause in the fraught dialectic is memorably repeated in Septimus:

But he himself remained high on his rock, like a drowned sailor on a rock. I leant over the edge of the boat and fell down, he thought. I went under the sea. I have been dead, and yet am now alive, but let me rest still, he begged...and as, before waking, the voices of birds and the sound of wheels chime and chatter in a queer harmony, grow louder and louder, and the sleeper feels himself drawing to the shores of life, the sun growing hotter, cries sounding louder, something tremendous about to happen. (77)

This suspense and adventure of the subject are often evoked in terms of sea imagery: 'an exquisite suspense, such as might stay a diver before plunging while the sea darkens and brightens beneath him, and the waves which threaten to break, but only gently split their...surface...'. (34-35). It is suspense between life and death<sup>27</sup>. As Clarissa's heart pauses between life and death before Big Ben strikes, she experiences the same suspense: 'one feels even in the midst of the traffic, or waking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense...before Big Ben strikes'(6). Big Ben clearly has masculine associations; earlier Peter had identified himself with 'the direct downright sound of Big Ben'(54). Big Ben in a sense even represents the Father: tolling the hours, it dissects the continuum of life; it imposes a structure upon life and keeps society moving in order (Mrs. Dalloway was titled The Hours in the early stages of Woolf's writing).<sup>28</sup> 'Shredding and slicing, dividing and subdividing, the clocks of Harley Street nibbled at the June day, counselled submission, upheld authority, and pointed out in chorus the supreme advantages of a sense of proportion'(113). Time also introduces death into life by its measuring

out of life, while life as sheer semiotic energy does not know death: 'she feared time itself...the dwindling of life...how little the margin that remained was capable any longer of stretching, of absorbing, as in the youthful years, the colours, salts, tones of existence'(34). Time is thus alien to the polymorphous, semiotic mode of being. Representing patriarchal law, aligned with the William Bradshaws of the world, Big Ben subjugates the human subject to the social order: 'Big Ben struck the half-hour...She [the old lady] was forced, so Clarissa imagined, by that sound, to move, to go'(140). 'The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. But she must go back. She must assemble. She must find Sally and Peter'(204-205). As law-giver, it forces the imperative 'must' on the human subject. As Clarissa lets the hours impose a structure on her life - 'First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable' (6) - she collects the dispersed parts of the self together into a social entity. Thus Clarissa's life is continual dispersion and reassemblage. She is never unitary, 'this' or 'that': she is laid out 'like a mist' or spreads like the sky ('It held, foolish as the idea was, something of her own in it, this country sky, this sky above Westminster' (204)), and yet she 'assembles' to be hostess of the party. The true 'site' of the subject is precisely this dialectic between self-assembly and dispersal: the melting away of the shell of the self by the heat of the sun and the freezing of it again into a hard crust by the winter's cold - 'Fear no more the heat o'the sun/Nor the furious winter's rages'.

Clarissa's subjectivity is at the same time the mode of the subject in the writing of this novel, which is self-reflectively epitomized by the clouds-passage I quoted above. Clarissa's contradictoriness, her internal divisions, denote the difficult problem of women's writing itself and point to the limits of Woolf's own writing. How can a woman give voice to the place of women and reject masculine discourse without



being marginalized into madness and silence? If language and the symbolic order are essentially masculine, this is only possible through the repression of the woman. Even the 'martial' Lady Bruton, who talks about politics like a man, has no power of language and logicity. Women have to constitute themselves as split subjects to enter into the symbolic and play a man's game. So Woolf never radically destroys the laws of syntax; she lets grammar dissect and regulate the flow of the subject's desire, and keeps the conventional narrative form of third-person and past-tense. Within this apparent conformism, however, Woolf's writing tries to give voice to the specificity of a female subject who is outside any principle of identity-to-self or self-integration, which can identify with multiple scenes without fully integrating herself into them.

## CHAPTER IV: TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

I: 'The Window'

When Roger Fry inquired of Virginia Woolf what 'symbolic meaning' the final arrival of her characters at the lighthouse might have, she replied:

I meant nothing by The Lighthouse. One has to have a central line down the middle of the book to hold the design together. I saw that all sorts of feelings would accrue to this, but I refused to think them out, & trusted that people would make it the deposit for their own emotions--which they have done, one thinking it means one thing another another. I can't manage Symbolism except in this vague, generalised way. Whether its [sic] right or wrong I don't know; but directly I'm told what a thing means, it becomes hateful to me.(QB,2:129)

Evoking a motif of the quest, the title To the Lighthouse renders the lighthouse a hermeneutic provocation, goading the reader into a sense of tantalising yet never quite delivered significance. To specify precisely what the lighthouse symbolizes might be to make it merely 'a deposit for our own emotions'. We risk yoking it violently to a significance we are in fact simply importing into it from outside. In its very elusiveness, the lighthouse becomes a sort of second-order symbol, a symbol of Symbolism itself, of that belief that art can redeem into order the chaotic flux of perception which was also shared by Woolf's contemporaries like T.S. Eliot and James Joyce. In his account of the novel David Lodge relates it to this wider context: 'In the modernist writers....we have observed a general tendency to develop....from a metonymic (realistic) to a metaphoric (symbolist or mythopoeic) representation of experience. Virginia Woolf exemplifies this tendency very clearly'.<sup>1</sup> But if the lighthouse concentrates the issue of symbolism in the novel, it does not exhaust it: symbols, and meditations on symbols, are scattered throughout the text.

I argued in my second chapter that though Jacob's Room aspires to the 'rose' or symbol, it remains aware of its actual failure to achieve



more than the 'ram's skull' of allegory. On the face of it, To the Lighthouse seems much more successful in its pursuit of symbolism. Mrs. Ramsay's privileged moments are themselves miniature symbols, bringing 'unrelated passions' (TL, 230) together into unity, demarcating a 'shape' in the midst of chaos, making 'of the moment something permanent'(249). Lily too partakes in the symbolic vision, witnessing the transformation of the Ramsays from their contingent ordinariness to universal 'symbols of marriage'(115). Returning to the Ramsay's summer house ten years later, Lily will suddenly perceive that 'the words became symbols'; they offer her an oblique glimpse at 'the truth of things'(228). As artist, Lily seeks to charge the everyday with a wealth of meaning and wonder; she seeks 'to be on a level with ordinary experience, to feel simply that's a chair, that's a table, and yet at the same time, It's a miracle, it's an ecstasy'(309-310). Her fidelity to 'ordinary experience' aligns her initially with Mr. Ramsay's philosophical empiricism, yet she will not rest there, seeking also a numinous glow that will redeem what would otherwise be merely quotidian. Mothering a family and painting a picture are in one sense opposites, and Lily will indeed fear that in her dedication to art she has sacrificed some essential emotional pith or warmth. But in another sense they are simply two modes of a common process, and Lily feels that Mrs. Ramsay's achievements remain in the mind 'like a work of art': 'in another sphere Lily herself tried to make of the moment something permanent'(249).

Lily's picture, in turn, is a figure for the text itself, as Woolf attests in her comment to Roger Fry; both painter and novelist are in search of that 'central line down the middle' which will solder their artefacts together. Lily's perennial problem with her painting is 'how to connect this mass on the right hand with that on the left' (86), how to find some mediation between the rigidly self-enclosed terms of a binary opposition. The central line which accomplishes this task may

itself be seen as symbolizing the Lighthouse. When James at last confronts the Lighthouse, it is 'stark and straight...barred with black and white' and, as if to humiliate as fully as possible his former lofty visions of it, it even has its washing spread on the rocks. Yet James does after all accept that this bare reality and the mystical lighthouse of his childhood are one and the same: 'for nothing was simply one thing'(286). James has thus become capable of symbolization; the drably everyday and the mystically significant converge in the symbol. Cut free from any restrictive single identification, the Lighthouse emerges as a symbol for both the fact of symbolism and the faculty of symbol-making. The question to be asked of the novel is whether it fully succeeds in its symbolist project, which I have so far described only as the text itself would 'officially' wish it to be described. But there seems to be a discrepancy between declaration and achievement in this novel, an ambivalence for which Mrs. Ramsay provides a helpful image early in the book. Putting her children to bed, Mrs. Ramsay tactfully manages to make Cam believe that the boar's skull (another version of the ram's skull of Jacob's Room) does not exist and that only the bird's nest in the beautiful valley does, while simultaneously convincing James that the skull is in fact still there. I shall argue that this is a self-reflexive image of the text, which will itself employ such contradictory logic.

Stylistically, To the Lighthouse brings to full maturity the techniques of Mrs. Dalloway - not only in its use of 'stream of consciousness' but also in the greater density of metaphor and simile in the local texture of the writing. This triumph of metaphor is, however, also a thematic concern of the book, for it is possible to read the polarity of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay as an opposition between literal meaning and metaphoricity. The rigorous propositional discourse of the philosopher is contrasted with the symbolic metaphorical language of art. Boasting of 'his own accuracy of judgement', Mr. Ramsay refuses to tamper



with the facts, never altering 'a disagreeable word to suit the pleasure or convenience of any mortal being'(13). Mrs. Ramsay, on the other hand, as an artist whose raw materials are human emotions, distorts and exaggerates as necessary according to the emotional aim and context of her discourse. Since at least Plato, who expelled poetry from his Republic, philosophy has tried to distance itself from literature, denigrating the latter for the deceitful or dangerous potential of its fictions. If Mrs. Ramsay mentions 'something about "waves mountains high"', the rigorous rationalist Charles Tansley answers, 'yes...it was a little rough'(18). As a British empiricist, Mr. Ramsay represents a double chastening of philosophy, adding to its inaugural expulsion of literature a deep-grained suspicion of far-fetched metaphysical speculation; he thus represents, as it were, the very philosophy of philosophy, its most stringent self-discipline.

This opposition of philosophy and fiction emerges at the very start of the novel in the contention over the trip to the Lighthouse. 'Yes, of course, <sup>f</sup>if it's fine tomorrow,' says Mrs. Ramsay, filling her son's heart with an 'extraordinary joy' which, however, is cut short by her husband: '"But," said his father, stopping in front of the drawing-room window, "it won't be fine"'(12). Enraged by the 'extraordinary irrationality' (53) of his wife, Mr. Ramsay regards her remark to James as a mere story of some 'fabled land' (13); she 'in effect, told lies' (53-54). The very intensity of Mr. Ramsay's reaction here already suggests that he is not the impersonal arbiter he takes himself to be. Ramsay's critique of his wife 'rend[s] the thin veils of civilisation so wantonly, so brutally' (54), and this points to a paradox in his position. On the one hand, he is civilisation's most eminent representative, working at the limits of its consciousness and pitching its standard in hitherto unoccupied territory. But he is so far in advance that, on the other hand, he has somehow never quite reached the stage of civilisation at all, cannot

grasp even those minimal human decencies which make life together in society bearable. Almost 'post-social' as a lonely path-breaking intellectual, Ramsay is simultaneously 'pre-social' as man and human being. A related ambivalence occurs in the geography of the novel. In placing the Ramsay's summer house on an island in the Hebrides, the novel locates it at the furthest frontier of civilisation. It is a distinctly Ramsayan locality, its chilly Northernness being set in implicit contrast to Mrs. Ramsay's fertilising Southernness ('had she not in her veins the blood of that very noble, if slightly mythical, Italian house'(19)). Yet in being physically cut off from the effective centres of civilisation, the island becomes a moral centre of it, concentrating its essential traits without any of the distracting trivia of the actual civilised London world of, say, the Dalloways. This is also true of the time of the novel; for a holiday cuts one away from the day-to-day ephemera of society only to give one time to cultivate those close, interpersonal relations which, for Bloomsbury at least, are its distilled inner essence.

When attacked by Mr. Ramsay in the name of his uncompromising Reason or Logos, Mrs. Ramsay defends herself in the name of 'people's feelings'(54). At this moment she is aligned with the values of art against philosophy, since she is 'keeping her head as much in the same position as possible' (31) for the sake of Lily's painting. There are already ambivalences here which I shall explore fully later. Mrs. Ramsay herself does not take Lily's painting very seriously; and while she represents a certain mobility of language, the art-work itself seeks to effect an almost deathly immobilization, keeping her as still as possible. Nonetheless, the contrast with her husband holds, and lends itself to a psychoanalytic reading, for she dreams of the delight she would have if her son should 'turn out a great artist'(52). Soon after, Ramsay returns to tease James, tickling his bare calf with a stick: 'James will have to write his dissertation one of these days'(53).



Flaunting the power of the phallus ('sprig'), the father both mocks his son's incompetence and warns him that he will one day have to resemble the father, thus threatening to end the relationship with the mother. Mrs. Ramsay has been knitting a 'reddish-brown stocking' (13) for the sick little boy on the Lighthouse, but since James yearns to be a boy on a Lighthouse, she is in a sense knitting it for him. Designed to protect her son's 'bare leg' (53) against the paternal sprig, the stocking's real purpose is displaced into simple kindness towards the Lighthouse boy, so that the depth of Mrs. Ramsay's resistance to her husband may be muted. But the stocking is not only defensive; it will also be a counter-phallus, in the spirit of Roland Barthes's remarks on 'the symbolism of the braid': 'Freud, considering the origin of weaving, saw it as the labour of a woman braiding her pubic hairs to form the absent penis'.<sup>2</sup> James is at the centre of a classical Oedipal triangle as philosophy and art, reality and fiction, struggle over him.

But if philosophy tries to purge literature in the name of the transparency of language to truth, it soon discovers that the relationship between it and its 'discredited' counterpart is less secure than it thought. Ramsay may regard his wife as an impediment to his nobler aims, but in fact he 'depended' on her (65) in his continual demand for sympathy: 'It was sympathy he wanted, to be assured of his genius, first of all, and then to be taken within the circle of life, warmed and soothed, to have his senses restored to him, his barrenness made fertile, and all the rooms of the house made full of life...' (62). Yielding immediately to all his demands, Mrs. Ramsay practices on him the very mode of rhetoric he had denounced when she satisfied James with it. Mr. Ramsay, 'filled with her words, like a child who drops off satisfied' (64), offers no acerbic rejoinders now. In a brief subversive impulse, which she at once tries to suppress, Mrs. Ramsay is able 'to feel finer than her husband', to admit that she is not 'entirely sure, when she

spoke to him [i.e. flattered him], of the truth of what she said'(65). She projects onto an anonymous general subject her own central, but inadmissible, perception: 'people said he depended on her'(65). One way in which the novel both controls and releases this feminist subversiveness is through the figure of Charles Tansley. By divorcing the most disagreeable aspects of what we could call 'Ramsay-ism' from the hero and projecting them onto his mere disciple, the text reduces the ambivalence of Mr. Ramsay himself and makes easier that idealization of him which it will occasionally indulge. At the same time, the hostility that is properly a response to Ramsay can be more readily expressed towards the meaner figure of his follower. Though still in displaced forms, Mrs. Ramsay can become positively castrating towards him. Walking into town with Tansley, she observes a 'one-armed man' sticking up a circus poster: 'his left arm had been cut off in a reaping machine two years ago'(23). It seems to me to be the thought of the amputated limb rather than the circus itself which 'filled her with childlike exultation and made her forget her pity' in a sudden access of castrating rebelliousness against her usual sympathetic role. A few pages later, once more vexed by the 'odious little man' Tansley, Mrs. Ramsay turns the pages of the store's list in search of 'the picture of a rake or a mowing-machine'(29). She makes her way through a chain of associations - mowing-machine, reaping-machine, amputated arm - in another subdued threat of castration.

In the relationship of the Ramsays we can see enacted a Derridean deconstruction of the usual hierarchy philosophy/literature. For, in Jonathan Culler's synopsis of Derrida's position, philosophy can be seen to constitute itself in relation to the Logos

by identifying as its Other a fictional and rhetorical mode of discourse, and the demonstration, carried out for example in some of Nietzsche's texts, that philosophy too is a rhetorical structure, based on fictions generated by tropes, leads one to posit what one might call an archi- or proto-literature which



would be the common condition of both literature and philosophy. Philosophy cannot escape the rhetorical, the literary, the linguistic.<sup>3</sup>

As a version of the opposition between philosophy and literature, the polarity of man and woman in To the Lighthouse is governed by the theological metaphor of the fall, as the former term is seduced out of its native realm of pure spirit into the fallen world of materiality, body or signifier: 'Of course Ramsay had dished himself by marrying a beautiful woman and having eight children'(141). These are Tansley's words, but they reflect the general attitude of men to women in the text. On the other hand, women are merely trifles, elegant trinkets to have about the home, but, on the other hand, they are immovable leaden weights, shackling the free play of the male mind. For Ramsay, his wife and child are 'trifles so slight compared with the august theme just now before him' (73), yet 'he would have written better books if he had not married'(110). Women are a danger both quantitative and qualitative. In one sense, they simply take up one's time, making one's books shorter than they would otherwise have been; William Banks complains that 'if he had been alone dinner would have been almost over now; he would have been free to work'(138). But in another sense, they infiltrate the very substance of one's thinking, not just truncating one's books but making them qualitatively worse than they would have been. Women thus menace philosophy both from the outside and the inside, and have all the ambivalence of a derridean 'supplement'. The superfluous - women and children -the thing philosophy tries to purge itself of - soak into the very core of its being.

'He would have been free to work.' Philosophy serves in this novel as a figure for social labour in general, thereby taking on the role of the political world in Mrs. Dalloway. If Clarissa and Mrs. Ramsay have close mutual affinities, both valorizing the world of intimate personal relationships, the other terms of the oppositions in which they are

structured have changed, and it is worth inquiring into the effect of this. In Mrs. Dalloway the public world in a sense depends on the private, finding there emotional solace for its own occasionally arid pomp and formality (Hugh Whitbread). Yet it is also clear that the private domestic world of feeling also depends vitally on the exercise of political power to secure the material privileges which alone ensure its continuance. In To the Lighthouse the 'public' world of philosophy depends still more deeply on the domestic interior, but the converse is no longer true; philosophy does not support bourgeois dinner parties in the way class politics does. True, Mrs. Ramsay subjectively experiences that kind of support ('she let it uphold her...this admirable fabric of the masculine intelligence' (164)), but objectively it just does not; it would be an extreme idealism, quite at odds with Mr. Ramsay's own empiricism, to suppose it did. Philosophy drains affection from domesticity, but gives nothing in return: 'That man, she [Lily] thought...never gave; that man took...Mrs. Ramsay had given. Giving, giving, giving, she had died'(231-232). But in Mrs. Dalloway politics more benignly refreshed itself from a domesticity whose essential bulwark it nonetheless was. The odds are stacked against Mr. Ramsay by contrast with Mr. Dalloway, and the island setting of the novel reinforces this tendency. In this isolated community, Mrs. Ramsay's social gifts of uniting people, of smoothing differences, assume a greater importance because tensions are not blunted by the everyday bustle of public life, but could grow to alarming proportions if not carefully defused. But at the same time the world of metaphysics, dissertations and scholarships shrinks to tiny proportions, and thus Mr. Ramsay is reduced. Only in one way does he better Dalloway. Politics is the more or less naked exercise of class-power and militarism, as compared to the disinterested contemplation of philosophy. Dalloway remains stubbornly mundane, but Mr. Ramsay is a potentially idealizable figure. Ramsay has the personal integrity, the refusal to compromise with the system, of Peter Walsh,



while playing the structural role of Dalloway, representing the system itself in contrast to the domesticity of his wife. He is, as I pointed out earlier, the system's eminent representative and its rebel, a cross-breed of the two male figures of the earlier book. But if Ramsay represents disinterestedness in contrast to Dalloway's worldliness, even this is only gained at a price: philosophy is pure precisely in proportion to its triviality, its endless hair-splitting over the 'kitchen-tables' of Lily's imaginings.

If Mr. Ramsay is both Peter Walsh and Mr. Dalloway, he also condenses into a single figure two still more illustrious literary predecessors, Casaubon and Lydgate from George Eliot's Middlemarch. Like the former, Mr. Ramsay is a dried-up, aging academic, a man no longer capable of living up to his former promise; like the latter, he regards himself as ruined in his intellectual career through marriage to a trivial wife. Mr. Ramsay is much concerned with 'subject and object' (40), and it is a split between these two faces of reality that is at issue here, since Mr. Ramsay is objectively a Casaubon but subjectively a Lydgate. A similar split characterizes the relation between his philosophy and life. As an empiricist, he regards the subject as a tabula rasa, awaiting the outer world to imprint its messages upon it; mind for Ramsay is a humble, passive receptacle. Personally, however, he is a moral idealist, his own ego swelling to absorb into itself every aspect of its world, imperiously shaping its objects to its subjective needs. My comparison with Middlemarch is prompted by the novel's own curious reference to the book. When Mr. Ramsay 'talked about George Eliot' to Minta 'she had been really frightened, for she had left the third volume of Middlemarch in the train and she never knew what happened in the end'(153). To the Lighthouse thus chops up Middlemarch, just as the reaping-machine had earlier lopped off the bill-sticker's arm. A Bloomian 'anxiety of influence' seems to be at work here,<sup>4</sup> as To the

Lighthouse 'castrates' a commanding precursor on its own theme of the intellectual husband. Middlemarch must be silenced in this way because we might compare Mrs. Ramsay as well as her husband to her Eliotic predecessors. For if she is certainly not the idealistic Dorothea, she can only be a structural equivalent of the repulsive Rosamund Vincy, representing in more benign form the social banalities of the latter, but this is not an identification To the Lighthouse cares to pursue.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay see each other as an inadequate Nature that needs the support of themselves as Culture. Mr. Ramsay's body has an inelegant clumsiness in inverse proportion to the subtle, inner poise of his speculations; his physical gestures remind his wife of 'the great sea lion at the Zoo tumbling backwards after swallowing his fish and walloping off'(55). Curiously, though, this image supports Ramsay's view of himself as a proud natural force entrapped and made ridiculous (leaping for fish) by the rituals of civilisation. For his part, Mr. Ramsay also sees his wife as representing a deficient Nature, the lovable defencelessness of the small child; she and James are 'children picking up shells, divinely innocent and occupied with little trifles.... They needed his protection; he gave it them'(56-57). Mr. Ramsay, of course, is a child too, as far as his wife is concerned. He may see himself as a Promethean quester carrying light and fire into regions not yet claimed for civilisation, but his wife regards herself as the light-bearer: 'as a nurse carrying a light across a dark room assures a fractious child'(63). Once again, then, Mr. Ramsay is both post-and pre-social, so far ahead in the intellectual avantgarde that he has, as 'child', not yet caught up with the straggling back ranks of his society. To impute to anyone the status of a child is to express one's love and protectiveness, but also to reify one's relationship to them. Children develop ('Why...should they grow up so fast?' (94)), but adults-as-children are locked in an eternal stasis of the personality. The protective love one extends to them is regressive, far removed from adult



emotional interchange. To see the other as a child is also a technique for avoiding blame and friction, for the petulance of the other then becomes 'natural', a simple expression of Nature, rather than a tension in a real and developing relationship. So, in a sense, in a relationship with a not yet fully developed subject, one can be master. Mrs. Ramsay wishes 'always to have had a baby': 'She was happiest carrying one in her arms. Then people might say she was tyrannical, domineering, masterful, if they chose; she did not mind'(94).

In seeing each other as children, both husband and wife project their own lack onto the other sex. In this novel it is not only the woman who suffers a lack that puts her in need of protection; Mrs. Ramsay pities 'men always as if they lacked something - but women never, as if they had something'(133). This shifting of the locus of lack enters and confuses the sexual imagery in the text. On the one hand, Mrs. Ramsay's responsiveness to Ramsay's demand for sympathy is the opening of a warm female interior into which the male, as 'a beak of brass', plunges himself. As John Mepham notes, the sexual theme 'is also present in a series of words which function simultaneously in several of these strands of metaphor ("pulse", "throb", "erect", "aglow", "she bade him take his ease there, go in and out, enjoy himself")'.<sup>5</sup> But Mrs. Ramsay's response is not only passively receptive; she is not only an empiricist tabula rasa on which her husband can inscribe his need. 'Animated and alive', Mrs. Ramsay also 'pour[s] erect into the air a rain of energy, a column of spray' (61-62), which is more forceful than we might have expected from the 'defencelessness' of a 'divinely innocent' child. 'There throbbed through her, like the pulse in a spring which has expanded to its full width and now gently ceases to beat, the rapture of successful creation'(64). Different aspects of the male sexual act are split apart and attributed to characters of the opposite sex. Mr. Ramsay retains only its physically penetrative side, that aspect which, when isolated,

can be seen as a brute violence forcing its way into the delicate membranes of the female interior. The more 'positive' side of male sexuality, the ejaculation of the fertilizing seed deep within the female, is projected onto Mrs. Ramsay. In this divorce between 'form' and 'content', Ramsay retains only the physical husk of the act, while his wife appropriates its inner procreative kernel. This splitting should be seen in the light of my earlier comparison of Ramsay to Mr. Dalloway. If philosophy, unlike politics, could give nothing to the feminine world of domesticity, this also extends into the Ramsay's metaphorical sexual life, where even the male's limited role in procreation is snatched away from him.

Plunging and thrusting into his wife, Mr. Ramsay has all the obvious, 'histrionic' activity of male sex. But being the 'ejaculator', Mrs. Ramsay retains a deeper activity, the inner activity of the teeming, fertilizing energy of the semen as opposed to the mere physical mechanism that deposits it. Freud had argued that it was improper to identify femininity with passivity, masculinity with activity. For him the opposition active/passive characterizes the infantile anal phase, whereas masculine/feminine is the logic of adult sexuality; to confuse the two oppositions is 'the error of superimposition'.<sup>6</sup> Active and passive are the qualities of biological drives, not genders. If To the Lighthouse consents to some degree to Mrs. Ramsay's 'passive' role of ministering angel in the house to her 'active' intellectual spouse, if it in part regards her as subsidiary nurse to his primary speculations, it also suggests a simultaneous counter-logic to these positions. The 'passive' role turns out to display a truer activity than the 'active', and the 'subsidiary' is revealed as essential to that 'primary' function to which it had initially seemed a mere external crutch. Mr. Ramsay's self-serving oppositions -- between philosophy and fiction, men and women -- are, to cite Derrida, 'a violent hierarchy' and not 'the peaceful co-existence of a vis-à-vis'.<sup>7</sup> Yet the text itself undoes these



hierarchies, dismantling and reversing them to the point where the excluded term becomes the inner truth of its opposite, where people will at last acknowledge that 'he depended on her'(65).

Mr. Ramsay is both phallus and child, Mrs. Ramsay is both open womb and phallus. Though this ambivalence characterizes their relation in general, it is brought to a sharp focus in their son James who is living this conflict in his Oedipal crisis. The father is a disturbing intruder into James's Imaginary (diadic) relationship with his mother: 'the perfect simplicity and good sense of his relations with his mother' (61). Mrs. Ramsay is thus phallic because the pre-Oedipal child has not yet discovered her 'castration'. Since James has not yet accepted his submission to and identification with the father, he sees Mr. Ramsay in part as just another demanding child, lacking something which his mother, as 'whole', can give and fill with her 'phallus'. Yet at the same time he does experience the mother's lack, in two ways. On the one hand, he wants to be the phallus for her, to substitute, along the lines of Freud's equation faeces-penis-child, for the phallus which she lacks. James accordingly 'stood stiff between her knees'(63). On the other hand, he experiences her lack as her very powerlessness to resist the insistent penetrations of the father, 'the beak of brass, the arid scimitar of his father, the egotistical man', which 'plunged and smote'(63). Inasmuch as his mother desires this penetration by the male, she also implicitly desires her own son's impotence, rejecting him as ersatz phallus for the real one the father offers her. If, as phallic mother, Mrs. Ramsay protects the child, as open female womb she is more ambivalent, simultaneously offering him the chance to be the phallus for her to complete her lack and yet rejecting him for the father's phallus. A substitute is only important as long as you cannot have the real thing, and thus James will finally be left alone: 'she had risen somehow and gone away and left him there, impotent'(287). James will ultimately

accept his symbolic castration and the Law of the Father; he will abandon the desire to be the phallus for the mother and wait to become like his father, 'having' the phallus himself.<sup>8</sup> During the boat trip he completes his paternal identification, becoming himself 'the lawgiver' (260) to Cam.

Binary oppositions and hierarchies in this novel are ceaselessly undone. Philosophy condemns fiction, but is not exempt from a persistent fictionality of its own. Ramsay denounces his wife for the rhetoricity of her language - its distortions of facts, its virtual lies - and this rhetoricity has a twofold nature. On the one hand, she uses figures and tropes rather than a strictly 'transparent' language, a mythologie blanche<sup>9</sup> that would let the truth shine unimpededly through. But, on the other hand, her discourse is rhetorical in that it is attuned to specific situations, taking its predominant colouring from the nature and demands of its interlocutors instead of aspiring to an impersonal objectivity. Mrs. Ramsay's language is always situation-specific, employing fictions according to present need. Yet the irony of Ramsay's irritation with his wife is that he himself is no less 'guilty' of this very charge. Bitterly denouncing her exaggeration ('You're teaching your daughters to exaggerate' (106)), he is not the strict adherent to pure referentiality that he imagines himself to be; Lily is alarmed by the 'touch of...exaggeration'(241) in his face. If his wife angers him so much, it is not simply that her fictionality grates on his nerves as the converse of his own convictions; it is rather that she might compel him to face up to the secret truth of his own discourse. Mrs. Ramsay is both the binary opposite of philosophy and a dangerous revelation and exaggeration of its own procedures; she is both the outside and the inner core of philosophical discourse. Subjectively, Mr. Ramsay sees her as his contrary, divided from him by the sharp line between truth and fiction. Objectively, however, there is a continuum between husband and wife, the latter revealing, as Nietzsche had argued, that truth itself is just a



metaphor or fiction whose fictionality we have forgotten. At crucial moments in the text the polarity truth/fiction is suddenly reversed. All her husband's 'phrase-making was a game,' reflects Mrs. Ramsay: 'it annoyed her, this phrase-making, and she said to him, in a matter-of-fact way, that it was a perfectly lovely evening'(110). Ramsay is thus contradiction incarnate: a philosophical empiricist who is an emotional idealist, a remorseless enemy of fiction who indulges in incessant self-pitying fables and phrase-making. Though he demands objectivity, Mr. Ramsay will not even allow literature the kind of universality it might justly claim. Instead of reading literary texts as statements about human nature in general, he manipulates them to his own subjective purpose. Aware that he is orchestrating an 'impure rhapsody', he nonetheless cannot renounce the 'delicious emotion' (44) aroused by the poetry he incessantly recites. As a literary reader, Mr. Ramsay is guilty of the very 'affective fallacy,' for which he criticizes his wife, that of valuing objects (poems or trips to lighthouses) purely in terms of their emotional effects. Mr. Ramsay wildly exaggerates and distorts as a reader of verse, seeming to believe that by an 'explosion' (316) of literariness in this special realm he can purge his thought of rhetorical elements that might otherwise contaminate his philosophy.

Mrs. Ramsay is both wanderer in the 'fabled land' and stubbornly 'matter-of-fact', a contradiction inherent in the stereotypical image of women. At one level, woman represents the body, that substratum of materiality without which her husband's loftier abstract creations could not exist, but which also threatens to impede and 'dish' them. Woman's own evident physicality - the facts of menstruation, of childbearing - and her down-to-earth social role in child-care qualify her for this identification with the body, the material, the matter of fact. Yet, at another level, woman is also the irrational, her everyday intellectual caprices being only a short distance from psychosis and insanity. Woman

is thus in a sense more 'abstract' than her intellectual husband, because his speculations maintain a self-discipline of mutual entailment and linearity (from P to Q to R, in Ramsay's terms) while hers are unconstrained, excessive. The female biology is simultaneously the opposite of the male intellect and the ground for intellect's dangerous liberation into fancy or madness. Matter-of-fact and fable-making at the same time, woman is denigrated by the men in the text on both grounds alternately, while she is valorized over them by the text for the same contradictory reasons.

Mrs. Ramsay represents both an excess and a lack of speech. Charles Tansley sees women as doing 'nothing but talk, talk, talk' (134), yet Mrs. Ramsay reflects of her husband that 'he found talking so much easier than she did. He could say things - she never could'(190). Similarly, when she does talk, her language is both charged with subjectivity and yet strangely void of it. It is full of the caringness of Mrs. Ramsay as social unifier, as nurturer of emotions, yet it strikes its hearers as curiously elusive. Lily is convinced that 'knowledge and wisdom were stored in Mrs. Ramsay's heart', but to gain access to them is not easy. Even before Mrs. Ramsay's death, she is metaphorically represented as 'tablets bearing sacred inscriptions, which if one could spell them out would teach one everything, but they would never be offered openly, never made public'(82). Mrs. Ramsay's sympathetic openness to her husband's 'arid scimitar' is counterbalanced by her opaqueness as sign to everyone in the book. Her discourse flaunts its subjectivity (kindliness) at one level only to conceal it tantalizingly at another, and thus it proves to be the exact converse of her husband's which, in claiming to be a mere impersonal vessel of facts, is actually charged with his manipulative emotional intentions. Mrs. Ramsay, who occasionally seems to the men of the book all surface and superficiality, is as elusive as Jacob Flanders. Like that earlier novel, To the Lighthouse is also a project to decipher the enigmatic 'sign' which is its protagonist.



Both Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay have their own specific mode of truth. Mr. Ramsay cannot reach Z, 'if thought ran like an alphabet from A to Z'(184-185). The use of the alphabet here is a metaphor for the linearity of Mr. Ramsay's thought, but it is also a figure for the necessary figurality of philosophy itself. It is not incapacity that prompts Woolf to use this way of representing Ramsay's work, as if she were simply incapable of rendering his researches in the highly specific way George Eliot evokes Lydgate's. Her point is rather that philosophy is originarily figurative, organized around certain master-tropes, a supposed ground that cannot itself be grounded. The figure of the alphabet is not just an illustrative analogy, which is how philosophy would like to see its own metaphors and similes; it rather points to an essential figurality of that discourse itself. Ramsay's adherence to linearity of argument is also a view of the nature of time. Each step being generated by its predecessor, both philosophy and time for Ramsay are rigidly consequential. The possibility of tomorrow's trip to the Lighthouse is totally determined by the configuration of factors - clouds, winds, air-pressure - existing at the present moment. Ramsay both respects and 'cancels' time simultaneously. He insists that its determined chain of events will not be altered for mere human convenience; yet, since the whole of the future is implicit in any single moment if we had skill enough to decipher it, he also in a sense collapses linearity into simultaneity. This dual aspect of his mentality is repeated in his attitude to the objects of his thought. Lily sees his work as a meditation on 'a scrubbed kitchen table' (40): 'this seeing of angular essences, this reducing of lovely evenings, with all their flamingo clouds and blue and silver to a white deal four-legged table'(41). This scrubbed table epitomizes the anti-rhetorical discourse Mr. Ramsay tries to adhere to; it is 'something bare, hard, not ornamental...no colour to it...all edges and angles...uncompromisingly

plain'(240-41). With 'no colour to it,' Ramsay's language refuses the colours of rhetoric. Ramsay is in quest of 'essences', the distilled inner truth of things, and in this sense he is strictly faithful to objects, hewing close to their contours. But at the same time his essences 'reduce' their objects, bleeding them dry of all specificity and thereby in a sense cancelling them out.

Mrs. Ramsay has her own mode of access to truth, as when she sits alone with her knitting: 'Losing personality, one lost the fret, the hurry, the stir; and there rose to her lips always some exclamation of triumph over life when things came together in this peace, this rest, this eternity' (100, emphasis added). Whereas Mr. Ramsay reduces, his wife synthesizes; things are not pared to their bare bones, but rather 'come together' in her moments of vision. Such privileged moments are to a degree anti-social, contrasted with what she momentarily sees as the mere fret and hurry of socializing. Yet they share the unifying structure of her great moments of social achievement, and to that extent are in continuity with them. Inside or outside her community, Mrs. Ramsay always achieves 'a summoning together'(100). Mr. Ramsay's meditations on 'subject and object and the nature of reality' (48) here give way to an indifferentiation of the subjective and the objective. His wife sits 'with her work in her hands until she became the thing she looked at - that light for example'(101). In this state of mind Mrs. Ramsay feels 'they [things] expressed one; felt they became one; felt they knew one; in a sense were one'(101). The female subject can reach out to its world in this way, because it was never a unified, sealed self in the first place. A division in that subject facilitates its responsiveness to its objects. An auto-affection - one part of the subject lovingly touching another - can be projected outwards. Merging with her objects, Mrs. Ramsay 'felt an irrational tenderness thus (she looked at that long steady light) as for oneself' (101); 'she praised herself in praising the light'(101). Aspects of the subject reach



towards each other in a sexual embrace; there 'rose from the lake of one's being, a mist, a bride to meet her lover'(102). The embrace will end in orgasm, for the lighthouse is 'stroking with its silver fingers some sealed vessel in her brain whose bursting would flood her with delight' (103); and this delicate digital caressing of the surfaces of the female sex seems far preferable to the arid phallic penetrations of a Ramsay. In a series of provocative essays, Luce Irigaray has related this division in the female subject to the structure of the female sexual organs: 'She is neither one nor two. She cannot, strictly speaking, be determined either as one person or as two', for 'a woman "touches herself" constantly without anyone being able to forbid her to do so, for her sex is composed of two lips which embrace continually. Thus within herself she is already two - but not divisible into ones - who stimulate each other'.<sup>10</sup> To the Lighthouse adds a nuance to this account. Woman's necessary self-caress has become numb through familiarity. Her auto-affection must thus make a detour outside itself into objects, swerving from the subject but only to the smallest extent that is compatible with its orgasmic return upon the subject in a full, 'defamiliarized' self-embrace. The Lighthouse is a necessary mediation of Mrs. Ramsay's auto-affection which lets it experience to the full its own latent reserve. But the Lighthouse also becomes an object of fear, 'the steady light, the pitiless, the remorseless, which was so much her, yet so little her'(103). Auto-affection must pass through the Lighthouse on its way back to itself, but it also risks being trapped in the Lighthouse, its temporary mediation potentially becoming its prison. The divided subject is both origin and end of the itinerary of auto-affection, yet in its need for the object to complete this circular journey, it inevitably falls into the power of that object; the Lighthouse 'had her at its beck and call'. Irigaray's account is a helpful starting point here, but not fully adequate to the complexities of the novel.

Mrs. Ramsay's dinner party is another privileged moment, a triumph of 'merging and flowing and creating' (131); she here glimpses something 'immune from change [which] shines out...in the face of the flowing, the fleeting'(163). Her achievement is symbolically crystallized in the Tennyson poem which Mr. Ramsay and Carmichael recite at the end of dinner. Like Mrs. Ramsay's own discourse, the words of this poem are both bafflingly opaque signifiers ('she did not know what they meant' (171)) and yet full with the desire of the subject: 'the words seemed to be spoken by her own voice, outside herself, saying...what had been in her mind'(171). Similarly, the words are both anonymous and autonomous, 'as if no one had said them, but they had come into existence of themselves' (171), but are also the collective self-expression of the dinner party: 'as if this were, at last...their own voice speaking'(172). In this Utopian linguistic moment, the disquieting features of writing - its anonymity, its opacity - are both acknowledged and surpassed in a Hegelian sublation. We approach what Derrida terms 'the absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning',<sup>11</sup> without, however, so absolute an effacement of the signifier as is usual in such experiences of full, living speech.

In Mrs. Ramsay's privileged moments there is a stress on a certain transcendence of materiality. Sitting at the window, she feels 'all the being and the doing...evaporated'(99). Later, in the security of her dinner party, she casts off heaviness and solidity: 'she hovered like a hawk suspended; like a flag floated in an element of joy'(162). She now feels that 'the thing is made that remains for ever' (163), but this access to the self-presence of meaning is ephemeral; with her foot on the threshold, she knows that it had become 'already the past'(173). Mrs. Ramsay is both more 'solid' than her husband, closer to the day by day routines of domestic life, and more 'immaterial' than he can ever be, since even into his boldest speculations he takes the nagging self-



centred doubts about his own fame. She, on the other hand, is capable of a proper transcendence of the personal, shedding all attachments to become 'a wedge-shaped core of darkness'(99). Mrs. Ramsay outdoes her spouse in both directions, and this is appropriate, since she represents fictionality or literature as against his philosophy. Literature is more 'material' than philosophical discourse, because it offers a sensuous 'body' and particularity while the latter aspires to the grey universality of the concept. Yet literature paradoxically outdoes philosophy on its own ground too. The very concretion of the literary text allows it to concentrate a wealth and play of meaning far above philosophy's stricter joining of single signifieds to unambiguous signifiers. Immaterial yet incarnate at the same time, both literature and Mrs. Ramsay leave Mr. Ramsay's grey abstractness far behind.

We can pursue these contrasts into Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's own reading of texts. When Mrs. Ramsay returns to the room after dinner, impelled by 'something I have come to get...without knowing quite what it was' (183), the words of the poem arise spontaneously in her mind. Language precedes the subject, is not simply at the latter's beck and call, and Mrs. Ramsay's response is indeed to the purely signifying rather than the signified or intentional aspect of these words: they begin 'washing from side to side of her mind rhythmically'(183). When she begins reading, she does so 'at random,' not asserting control of the matter, but surrendering to it in a happy mood of serendipity, and again 'she only knew this is white, or this is red. She did not know at first what the words meant at all'(184). In contrast to the stress on Mrs. Ramsay's transcendence at dinner, it is now her materiality that is foregrounded, her relish for the sumptuousness of the signifier without immediate regard for its content. Language is experienced here at the level of the Kristevan semiotic, as sheer rhythm, intonation, sound, colour. Mr. Ramsay, however, remains masterfully in control of the text he reads,

'weighing, considering, putting this with that as he read'(182). If he read his own novel, he would perhaps be acutely bothered, like Roger Fry, about the precise 'symbolic meaning' of its details. Though the text at one point maintains that he 'forgot himself completely' (185) as he reads, it in fact demonstrates that he is incapable of doing any such thing. His very motive for starting Scott's novel in the first place is secretly to assess his own prospects with futurity, since 'if young men did not care for this [Scott], naturally they did not care for him either'(186). The exact analytic play of mind as he weighs and judges is in fact in the service of his monstrous ego, and this is perhaps Woolf's warning to her own readers who may be equally inclined to make her text 'the deposit for their own emotions' (see p.118 above). As usual, To the Lighthouse is more explicit in its denunciations when they are directed at the stooge Tansley rather than his mentor: 'he wanted to assert himself...that was what his criticism of poor Sir Walter, or perhaps it was Jane Austen, amounted to. "I-I-I"'(165).

The highlight of 'The Window' is Mrs. Ramsay's reading of the sonnet: 'All the odds and ends of the day stuck to this magnet; her mind felt swept, felt clean. And then there it was, suddenly entire shaped in her hands, beautiful and reasonable, clear and complete, the essence sucked out of life and held rounded here - the sonnet (186-187). The danger of a Woolf heroine is that she may seem to be a mere glorified housewife, lost in the frivolous routines of a bourgeois social life, and Mrs. Ramsay must therefore be given a nobility and idealism of her own that will redeem the drabber aspects of domesticity and outdo the genuine, if limited, idealism of her husband. Fiction never quite rests easily under philosophy's charge that it is unserious, and it must contrive to gain the upper hand over its accuser on the latter's own terms. It is precisely this that is achieved by the sonnet, which captures an 'essence' of its own in contrast to the 'angular essences' of Ramsay's thought. Though 'sucked out of life' might seem to relate this



poetic essence to the predatory and reductive violence of philosophical analysis, this is in fact not the case. There is a benign 'sucking', that, say, of the child which relieves its mother of a reserve with which she would be otherwise painfully over-full, as well as the more 'vampiric' sucking of Ramsay's 'beak of brass'. Poetry reaches essences without sacrificing phenomena on its way to them. The sonnet is both 'beautiful and reasonable', achieving a sensuous perfection of form as well as the universality of the philosophical concept. It is both 'clear and complete', bringing the odds and ends of life together even as it sweeps them clean. When these odds and ends are harmonized in an organic whole, they are no longer untidily obtrusive as loose fragments, and in that sense they are 'swept away'. The sonnet reconciles all the oppositions around which 'The Window' has been organized; it fuses form and content, the dulce and the utile. It is a symbol in its own right, but also a figure for Mrs. Ramsay's earlier moments of symbolic vision, both alone and at the dinner party. Having the best of both worlds, the symbol appropriates for fiction the best qualities of philosophy without importing with them the latter's defects. Fortified by this poetic coup de grâce, Mrs. Ramsay closes this section of the novel 'smiling. For she had triumphed again'(191).

## II: 'Time Passes'

In a proleptic moment, the novel noted in 'The Window' that directly Mrs. Ramsay went 'a sort of disintegration set in' (173), and this disintegration is realized to its fullest extent in the second section, 'Time Passes'. This section represents a fall from grace, from the idyllic, 'organic' time of its predecessor to the painful 'post-lapsarian' visit to the summer house. The salvation of the symbolic moment gives way to a difficult, clumsy deciphering of meaning from moment to moment.

I argued in my second chapter that Woolf locates the historical moment of the fall from symbolism as the First World War, an event encompassed in the ten-year period covered by 'Time Passes'. But in this novel there is an interplay between the War and the death of Mrs. Ramsay. Both events are perfunctorily noted in parentheses, and both are seen as in some sense the loss of the possibility of totalizing meaning. Mrs. Ramsay's death precedes the war, and in a certain sense is not unrelated to it. With the loss of the harmonizing, soothing principle of femininity, the aggressive male ego bursts out on an international scale into militarism and violence. In Three Guineas Woolf will later more fully elaborate this connection between the loss of a certain kind of femininity and the likelihood of war.<sup>12</sup> But since Mrs. Ramsay also represents the old Victorian order, the war is in a sense the 'cause' of her death - the death less of a single woman than of a civilization. This dialectical relationship between the personal and the political is sustained in the image of the summer house itself, whose sufferings at the hands of time and climate are at the centre of this section of the text. On the one hand, the house represents the body of the mother, Mrs. Ramsay, in ways to which the psychoanalysis of Melanie Klein has alerted us and which I shall explore below. But, on the other hand, the house is also the figure of an entire social order, taking its place alongside such other literary houses as Mansfield Park or, closer in time, Howard's End.

'Time Passes' offers a consoling glimpse of the fuller symbolic perceptions of its predecessor, only to snatch it away almost at once. For a moment 'divine goodness had parted the curtain and displayed behind it, single, distinct, the hare erect; the wave falling; the boat rocking' (198). Yet even this is a redeemed Nature without a perceiving subject; Mrs. Ramsay is no longer included as one key term in the symbolic 'equation'. The curtain of materiality falls again as 'divine goodness, twitching the cord, draws the curtain' (199). There remains a lingering



sense of a possible transcendence behind objects, but the latter is no longer accessible in what had formerly been its mediations. The signifying face of the natural world has congealed to a degree that no longer lets its signified shine through. The beneficent exchanges between self and Nature ('how beauty outside mirrored beauty within' (207)) are no longer possible when, from the very depth of Nature itself, there arises the trace of the bloody carnage of World War One: 'a purplish stain upon the bland surface of the sea as if something had boiled and bled, invisibly, beneath' (207). In one sense, 'the mirror was broken' (208), and a brutalized Nature no longer reflects civilization back to itself, but in another, it gives a truer reflection than ever before, since that brutality was always already latent in civilisation. At one level, Nature is Culture's opposite, as the Scottish climate takes its slow, destructive toll of the house. But at another level Nature is in continuity with a profound destructiveness of Culture's own: what is literally destroying the house is rain, rats and wind, but what is figuratively destroying it is the First World War. A mirror is no longer a depthless reflecting surface. It is twisted into a double layer by this very contradiction: 'the mirror itself was but the surface glassiness which forms in quiescence when the nobler powers sleep beneath' (208). I take 'nobler powers' to be a bitter irony. If the symbolist vision is a myth, what 'sleeps beneath' is the lurking bloodiness of world war, which is both the negation of civilization and its highest reach (in technology, in the planned mobilization of whole societies, and so on). At its utmost limit civilization seems indistinguishable from barbarism. 'Did Nature supplement what men advanced?' asks the text anguishedly (207), and the answer is both yes and no. 'Supplement' here must be given the weight of its Derridean ambivalence - 'progress as the possibility of perversion', 'both humanity's good fortune and the origin of its perversion'.<sup>13</sup> Reflecting

culture back upon itself in the symbolist mirror, Nature completes it, yet it risks showing it a natural violence that may strike an answering chord at the very heart of culture itself.

Just as Nature mirrors Culture, woman mirrors man, reflecting back to the latter an image that bolsters him in his self-identity. In A Room of One's Own Woolf remarks that 'women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size' (35). Women, like Nature, should also ideally 'supplement what man had advanced'. Woman is both like Nature, in that she refreshes the emotional aridity of the male intellect, and unlike Nature, in that her function of social unification is on the side of culture. Mrs. Ramsay is a 'mirror', not for her husband alone but for the whole family, securing their self-identity by reflecting back a coherent image of the subject. As Luce Irigaray argues, this female mirror is 'entrusted by the (masculine) "subject" with the task of reflecting and redoubling himself. The role of "femininity" is prescribed moreover by this masculine specula(riza)tion and corresponds only slightly to woman's desire, which is recuperated only secretly, in hiding, and in a disturbing and unpardonable manner.'<sup>14</sup> As ideal Victorian Angel in the House, Mrs. Ramsay attempts to conform to this role, and is considered historically superseded by a younger female generation who 'sport with infidel ideas...of a life different from hers...not always taking care of some man or other' (16). Reflecting on her children, Mrs. Ramsay deplores that 'strife, divisions, difference of opinion, prejudices...should begin so early' (19). We here detect another ambivalence in the role of the First World War in this novel. The War is in the first place Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's own historical product, the unleashing of all the latent violence precariously repressed by their conventional Victorian roles. Yet with its national 'strife, divisions', its jingoistic 'prejudices', the First World War is clearly also the product of the younger generation. 'They were so critical, her children'



(19), as they cast off Victorian pieties and traditions to enter a new historical era of corrosive intellectuality. Mrs. Ramsay's values - her pacifying of ruffled male egos, her unifying - could, if mobilized internationally, have prevented the catastrophe, as Woolf would later attempt to do in Three Guineas.

However pious she may be, no Angel in the House can fully sustain her role. There always remains a margin of excess female desire, jostling against the limits society imposes on it. Mrs. Ramsay feels guilt at a sense of being 'finer than her husband' (65), extreme discomfort at not being sure that he is as academically gifted as she has just assured him he is. Desire may be defused by displacement or by the substitute gratifications of literature, as when Mrs. Ramsay reads the tale of the Fisherman's wife to James: 'For my wife, good Ilsabil,/Wills not as I'd have her will' (90). Or there may be socially allowable modes of female self-assertion, as in Mrs. Ramsay's penchant for matchmaking: 'Mrs. Ramsay...having brought it all about, somehow laughed, led her victims, Lily felt, to the altar' (157). Mrs. Ramsay on occasion even has something of the subversiveness of a Miss Kilman. Like the latter, she too can be accused by some woman 'of "robbing her of her daughter's affections"', of 'wishing to dominate, wishing to interfere'. Like Kilman too, she can even be 'ashamed of her own shabbiness' (92). Perhaps the key image in the novel of Mrs. Ramsay's repressed rebelliousness is 'the Swiss girl sobbing for her father who was dying of cancer' (19) in 'The Window'. Rebellion is gratified in contemplating the painful death of the father, while the censoring superego is satisfied by the stress on the girl's agony of grief at the imminent event, and the image thus has the dual-sidedness of a Freudian compromise-formation.

'No image...comes readily to hand bringing the night to order and making the world reflect the compass of the soul' (199); 'the mirror was broken' (208). With this breakdown of the mirror, the formerly excluded

Otherness can at last emerge, for it is no longer held firmly at the margins by the unitary, specular self. The images of natural fecundity, the 'rain of energy', which once attached to Mrs. Ramsay are now writ large in the natural world itself, where they become brutal, promiscuous and persecutory: 'winds and waves disported themselves like the amorphous bulks of leviathans whose brows are pierced by no light of reason, and mounted one on top of another, and lunged and plunged in the darkness or the daylight (for night and day, month and year ran shapelessly together) in idiot games' (208-209). Evolution runs in reverse in this section. Natural selection is a brutal process which paradoxically submits Nature to the shape of an eventual teleology; the means may be cruel, but the ultimate end-product is the unfolding of Reason and Culture. But now Nature asserts its resistance and otherness to evolution's attempt to convert it to Culture. The Ramsay's house figures in miniature their Victorian order, its calm, its leisure, its graces, and is eroded by a slow but persistent and ultimately near-devastating natural assault. As I have pointed out, women and Nature are in many ways linked in this novel, and Nature's assault on the house may thus be seen as enacting the dangerous liberation of Mrs. Ramsay's subterranean desire. At the same time, as I suggested, the house stands for Mrs. Ramsay herself, just as school-buildings, as Melanie Klein has demonstrated,<sup>15</sup> may represent the body of the mother for the child pupil. Feelings about the building, activities in relation to it (entering, defacing, breaking), are then charged with psychoanalytic meaning. Nature in part releases a subversive female fecundity of Mrs. Ramsay's own, but it also enacts a male sexual assault on a building that represents her as woman as well as Victorian. Moonlight 'gliding gently as if it laid its caress' (206) ominously becomes 'the trifling airs, nibbling, the clammy breaths, fumbling' (212) till at last 'a thistle thrust itself between the tiles in the larder' (213), a penetrative gesture that recalls Mr. Ramsay's arid beak-thrusts into his wife.



'What power could now prevent the fertility, the insensibility of nature?' (213). The answer, of course, is Mrs. McNab who will at first sustain, at last redeem, the house. The copulating leviathans display 'no light of reason' (208), and Mrs. McNab's own song is equally 'the voice of witlessness' (202). She is more Nature than Culture, a fact attested to by her recurrent difficulty in walking. She and her friend Mrs. Bast 'lurched', 'their legs ached'; Mrs. McNab 'hailed herself upstairs and rolled from room to room' (202, 215). Claude Lévi-Strauss has a helpful remark in his discussion of Oedipus, whose own name means 'swollen-foot': 'in mythology it is a universal characteristic of men born from the Earth that at the moment they emerge from the depth they either cannot walk or they walk clumsily'.<sup>16</sup> Mrs. McNab is thus a chthonic being still subject to the centripetal force of her parent earth. In contrast to her husband, Mrs. Ramsay certainly represents Nature, but in contrast with Mrs. McNab she is associated with an effete bourgeois culture against the more robust face of Nature itself. Strong class-feelings are also evoked here: Mrs. McNab 'mumble[s] out the old music hall song' (203), becoming one of those racy lower-class entertainers like Marie Lloyd to whom such contemporary intellectuals as T.S. Eliot liked to condescend.<sup>17</sup> The lower classes have that minimal degree of Culture which makes them (just) human, and that maximal degree of Nature which makes their inferiority to oneself so palpable. They can mediate the harsher aspects of the natural world to their superiors by their labour-power, as McNab and Bast do in restoring the house to order. Early in the novel Mrs. Ramsay had paid a charity visit to some poor women in the town (27); two hundred pages later the shards and shreds of her social world will be put back into some kind of order by just such women, and this is another example of the novel's deconstructive strategies. The excluded term turns out to be the inner truth of its dispossesser. The relationship of the Ramsays to the McNabs and Basts

reveals the irony of Hegel's master-slave dialectic, whereby the master ultimately becomes more enslaved than the wretches who serve him.

The mirror that is Mrs. Ramsay is broken, but Mrs. McNab too has an interest in mirrors. 'With her sidelong leer' she 'stood and gaped in the glass'; she twist[s] her face grinning in the glass' (203). Later, in a perhaps provocative gesture, 'she stood arms akimbo in front of the looking-glass' (209). This persistent irreverence in her attitude to mirrors suggests Mrs. McNab's rejection of the reflecting and magnifying of the male ego which is Mrs. Ramsay's role in life. This, however, is only in a limited sense a rejection because Mrs. McNab has never been offered the possibility of choice. Class superiority leads to a female scorn for McNab; she has neither the intelligence nor the sensitivity to understand what female mirroring is. But there is another, protofeminist impulse at work here: McNab is envied for her liberation from that stultifying feminine role, and hence the crazy energy that attaches to her despite her physical deformities. Male work is 'spiritualized' in To the Lighthouse by being represented by Mr. Ramsay's speculations, female work is brutalized in the figure of Mrs. McNab. Mrs. Ramsay offers a median position at once desirable and false. A woman's work may be the organizing of domestic dinner parties, and the novel is justly appreciative of the values achieved there, but there is another possibility. A woman might equally work in the public sphere, earning that five hundred pounds that would let her maintain a room of her own. Whether Mrs. Ramsay is the final synthesis of philosophy and labour, or whether there might rather be some other female possibility which she obscures - these are questions for Lily Briscoe.

### III: 'The Lighthouse'

'The Lighthouse' represents a sustained questioning on Lily's part into that vision of 'completeness' and 'wholeness' (295), associated with



Mrs. Ramsay, which had characterized life at the summer house ten years earlier: 'what does it mean then, what can it all mean?' (225). Gayatri Spivak has argued that 'To the Lighthouse can be read as a project to catch the essence of Mrs. Ramsay', and thus as another work on the theme I traced above in 'An Unwritten Novel' and Jacob's Room. For Spivak, the structure of the book is a grammatical allegory: 'Subject (Mrs. Ramsay) - copula - Predicate (painting)'.<sup>18</sup> Lily's completion of the picture is charged with the symbolic meaning of realizing the essence of Mrs. Ramsay. This is not so much a matter of the content of the painting, but rather of the process of creation itself, for Lily's act of painting duplicates the achievements of the older woman. 'Most welcome of all' to Mrs. Ramsay was 'a summoning together' (100), and Lily too will 'assemble outwardly the scattered parts of the vision within' (204). But if the motif of harmonizing fragments is shared by the two women, the process operates in different 'directions' in each case. Whereas Mrs. Ramsay must bring outward units (guests) into some inner, spiritual community, Lily must bring inner units (ideas, feeling, forms) into some coherent outward objectification.

Both women share a certain disjunction of inner and outer, though in Lily's case this split is internalized as between inner and outer layers of the mind. At one level she pursues her intense meditations over Mrs. Ramsay's death, while at another she ponders whether she shouldn't 'fetch another cup of coffee' (225). Such banal preoccupations threaten to ironize her deeper concern, reducing it to a mere 'catchword...caught up from some book' (225). Mrs. Ramsay had lived the same split between the most serious, metaphysical thinking and the insistent trivia of everyday life. The most famous instance is during her visionary perceptions at dinner: 'It partook, she felt, carefully helping Mr. Bankes to a specially tender piece, of eternity' (163). The reader is forced to enact the disjunction; his or her own quotidian expectations lead to the anticipation that 'tender piece, of...' will be followed by

'meat'; and 'eternity' comes as a defamiliarizing shock. Nor, once this initial shock has been negotiated, will the phrase settle comfortably into a single meaning. Does this juxtaposing of incommensurables ironize the symbolic vision, or does it rather, as in Eliot's definition of Metaphysical 'wit', yoke heterogeneous ideas by violence together in the flash and fusion of the conceit.<sup>19</sup> Both possibilities seem alternately valid, yet the suspicion that their opposite may after all be true troublingly recurs. The disjunction is perhaps mediated by the structure of the meal, which is both the satisfaction of basic biological needs and a cultural and signifying occasion, because it affirms human community in shared semiotic systems (codes of etiquette). Animality and civilization, fact and value, are joined together in the shared meal.

In his discussion of Virginia Woolf, Eliot had seen her writing as 'one of the most curious and interesting examples of a process of dissociation' (see above p.45). In her own essay 'The Narrow Bridge of Art' Woolf also regards the dissociation of sensibility as a characteristic of the modern age. Yet for Woolf the moment of dissociation or fall is the First World War, an event which Mrs. Ramsay's own disjunction between 'meat' and 'eternity' precedes. Mrs. Ramsay is, moreover, a representative of solid Victorian values, 'dusty and out of date' (269) as Lily calls her, and not a dissociated modernist. 'The discrepancy' which she experiences - 'that was what she was thinking, this was what she was doing' (130) - is a matter more of gender than of history, of being a woman in any society rather than being a member of this particular one at a particular moment. Women's intellectual capacities, their emotional idealisms, far outreach and are in constant friction with the mundane round of the domestic world they are supposed to maintain. Mrs. Ramsay must contemplate the mentality of great men while inspecting 'whether those were fresh mole-hills on the bank' (112). But though this disjunction between female being and doing is



transhistorical, preceding that more universal dissociation caused by World War One, it none the less has its historical modifications and is exacerbated in the modern age. Mrs. Ramsay's division is between the mental and the physical, and is a situation not without certain compensations. Though it is degrading to do menial tasks far beneath one's mental powers, it also offers the possibility of an inner refuge, because one's thoughts can range widely while one's hands are mechanically occupied. In Lily's case, however, this split is internalized, is between different aspects of the mind itself. This leaves her hands free, and it is now possible to be a painter rather than a housewife; but, on the other hand, it is now a facet of the woman's own nature that is trapped in meniality, and this is an oppression more intimate and enslaving than the mere physical conformism of Mrs. Ramsay.

Objectively, men are caught in a similar disjunction between their bold speculations and everyday routine. Subjectively, however, they do not experience it as disjunction. First, they cultivate a blindness to the quotidian, so that it barely registers on their consciousness. Despite an 'eye like an eagle's, Mr. Ramsay is 'blind, deaf, and dumb, to the ordinary things' (111). Preoccupied in his laboratory with his research, Mr. Banks finds that 'the world when he came out seemed to dazzle him' (272). But, secondly, women are anyway providing these domestic necessities for them, so they are practically sheltered from this potentially intrusive realm of the everyday; Mrs. Ramsay is forced 'to hide small daily things' (65). Blindness is seen both as man's natural incapacity and as his exploitation of his womenfolk, an ambivalence typical of Mrs. Ramsay's guilty subversiveness. Women are in a sense invisible, 'seen' only as absence, non-being, lack, not acknowledged in their difference and otherness. Having consigned both woman and the material world to a twilight zone of non-existence, the men in the novel cultivate an ascetic dedication to the pursuit of truth. They withdraw from the external areas of being into a single, icy,

concentrated point of will. Mr. Ramsay becomes a 'stake driven into the bed of a channel...marking the channel out there in the floods alone' (72). Women are rather represented by the murky, fluid welter of the ocean itself, for 'they could not keep anything clearly fixed in their minds' (258).

In A Room of One's Own Woolf pointed out that, deprived of her own retreat, woman must always write or think in the midst of the distractions and pressures of daily life. In Jacob's Room Betty Flanders was the image of this dilemma, writing her letters in a chaos of children and housework. To live through this disjunction between inner and outer, aspiration and brute fact, is personally dislocating, yet Woolf also suggests that this very tension may be more fructifying than the male exclusiveness that has simply abolished one of the two terms. Certainly her own writing - with its various points of view, its different levels of living, thinking, acting, gesture, in a single sentence, its numerous interjections and digressions within a single syntactic unit - all this enacts a commitment to the heterogeneity of female experience. Style is the registration of a mode of experience, as Woolf noted in remarking 'the difference between the man's and the woman's view of what constitutes the importance of any subject. From this spring out not only marked differences of plot and incident, but infinite differences in selection, method and style' (CW, 27). In 'Modern Fiction' she advises her reader: 'Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions - trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms' (CE, 2: 106). The irony of the passage in relation to To the Lighthouse is that this is Mr. Ramsay's empiricist philosophy, for the mind is mere passive recipient of external sensation, but Mrs. Ramsay's daily experience at the centre of a bustling household of guests, servants and children. Though he is intellectually



committed to the view of the mind as classicist 'mirror', receiving its scattered contents from an outside it can do no more than reflect, Mr. Ramsay actually lives it more as a Romantic 'lamp',<sup>20</sup> casting a unified beam out into a world it in part calls into being.

Lily's task is to catch Mrs. Ramsay's essence by completing her picture, but hers will not be the reductive logic and method that result in Mr. Ramsay's 'angular essences' (41). Whereas Mr. Ramsay aggressively penetrates his wife as a 'beak of brass' or 'arid scimitar' (63), Lily will rather follow what Irigaray has termed a strategy of 'the fluid' as against the masculine economy of 'the solid'.<sup>21</sup> 'What device for becoming, like waters poured into one jar, inextricably the same, one with the object one adored? Could the body achieve it, or the mind, subtly mingling in the intricate passages of the brain? or the heart?' (82). Demanding 'intimacy itself,, Lily desires 'nothing that could be written in any language known to men' (83). In its linearity, such male language has something in common with phallic penetration as a mode of knowledge; it can only effect entry into the object at a single point and from a single perspective. In contrast, Lily dreams of multi-perspectivism and simultaneity. Against the male gaze, so focused it cannot grasp the trivial or evanescent, she demands 'fifty pairs of eyes to see with' (303); it is 'not knowledge but unity that she desired' (83). Penetration must give way to gentle envelopment. The former burrows at a single point in order to infiltrate the very core of its object, while the latter surrounds so caressingly and totally that the object rather becomes its inner core: 'One wanted most some secret sense, fine as air, with which to steal through keyholes and surround her where she sat knitting, talking, sitting silent in the window alone; which took to itself and treasured up like the air which held the smoke of the steamer, her thoughts, her imaginations, her desires' (303-304). Envelopment is a mode of total contact that paradoxically retains a distance that leaves the loved object its autonomy, whereas male

penetration makes a localized incision but claims absolute possession of its object. Lily seeks a love that is 'distilled and filtered; love that never attempted to clutch its object' (77). Irigaray further elaborates this distinction: 'Nearness...is not foreign to woman, a nearness so close that any identification of one or the other, and therefore any form of property, is impossible. Woman enjoys a closeness with the other that is so near she cannot possess it, any more than she can possess herself'.<sup>22</sup>

This strategy of 'fluidity' is also the strategy adopted by the author in her writing of the book. Lily's dream of multi-perspectivism and simultaneity, 'intimacy itself' are Virginia Woolf's own aims in writing, whereby she seeks to achieve those 'infinite differences in selection, method and style' from 'masculine' writing. Woolf's ideal strategy of writing, of rendering characters, is well epitomized in the movements of Mrs. Ramsay's mind at the dinner party. Hearing and seeing the other people enjoying the dinner, she feels as if she can see their thoughts and feelings 'without effort like a light stealing under water so that its ripples and the reeds in it and the minnows balancing themselves, and the sudden silent trout are all lit up hanging, trembling' (165). Here again, as in Lily's dream, a different strategy for knowing the object (the other) is adumbrated. Like Mrs. Ramsay's 'eyes', Woolf also tries to 'go around' the characters, 'unveiling...their thoughts and their feelings' (165). In 1926 she at last felt she had achieved this: 'It is proved, I think, that what I have to say is to be said in this manner' (WD, 99), 'I have made my method perfect' (WD, 102). Her main literary device for this end is, as I pointed out in my previous chapter, 'free indirect speech', which produces a 'fluid', unstable status for the locus of the subject of the sentence. The author can situate herself somewhere between the viewpoint of the omnipotent narrator and the character's own consciousness, or she



can move smoothly from one character's thought to another's within a single sentence: 'she hovered like a hawk suspended; like a flag floated in an element of joy which filled every nerve of her body fully and sweetly, not noisily, solemnly rather'(162). In this passage the metaphors can no longer be identified as emanating from either the author's point of view or Mrs. Ramsay's own; they are indistinguishably fused. '...for it arose, she thought' - so it is Mrs. Ramsay's own thinking, but it is too elaborate for the direct transcription of her consciousness. The strategy is never a clutching or violent penetrating, but an 'unveiling' and 'stealing under water'. For if the object is a butterfly, 'when you've grasped the stem the butterfly's off'. 'I won't raise my hand', the author says, 'Hang still, then, quiver, life, soul, spirit...I, too, on my flower' (HH, 20). If one aspires, like Mrs. Ramsay, to hold 'the whole...together'(TL, 165), one cannot intrude oneself, one has to respect the alterity of the object; this will leave some distance from the other in spite of the infinite nearness one aims at. Hence the 'doubtful ring', the continual indeterminacy, which Auerbach pointed to in his seminal discussion of Woolf's narrative viewpoint in Mimesis.<sup>23</sup>

Male love in the novel is at once violent and fascinating, a conjunction of impulses that points to the masochism instilled in woman by centuries of subordination. To Lily, Paul Rayley's love has a fierce phallic power that would be her destruction; it is 'the most barbaric of human passions' (159), 'a fire sent up in token of some celebration by savages' (270). As a 'bully with a crowbar' (159), Paul becomes another version of Mr. Ramsay's 'brass beak', another testimony to the brutal, harassing force of the phallus. Such penetratingness is experienced by Lily as a threat to the integrity of her being, of which her physical virginity ('treasure of the house' (271)) is both emblem and shield. In her fear and retreat from male penetration, Lily shows a kinship to Mrs. Dalloway. As the latter tucked away the dress she was mending,

'like a virgin protecting chastity, respecting privacy' (MD, 45), against the pen-knife wielding of Peter Walsh, so too does Lily draw her skirts closer round her ankles to ward off Mr. Ramsay's demand for female submission (TL, 236). Only whereas Clarissa's is a spiritual virginity retained despite marriage and childbirth, Lily's is both spiritual integrity and physical membrane. And just as Clarissa feels compunction over her frigidity, so too does Lily have a sense of guilt over her coldness to Mr. Ramsay, which reveals how deeply she has internalized her culture's hostile valuations of spinsterdom. She regards herself on occasion as a 'miserable sinner' (236), 'not a woman, but a peevish, ill-tempered, dried-up old maid presumably'(234). 'Presumably' here marks Lily's distance from the self-accusation even as she makes it. She is 'not a woman' in that she will not succumb to the role demanded of women in her society, but, on the other hand, there is no available social language for the role she genuinely aspires to, and she must therefore define herself in the very terms of her enemies. Prue Ramsay is the novel's most graphic image of a surrendered virginity. Her own state just before marriage is projected onto the spring, which 'like a virgin fierce in her chastity, scornful in her purity, was laid out on fields wide-eyed and watchful and entirely careless of what was done or thought by the beholders' (204). Later we are informed, in a parenthesis as 'entirely careless' as this virgin's gaze is claimed to be, that Prue had died during some illness connected with childbirth. Virginity is not a sufficient guarantee of its own survival; it will have to mute its 'fierceness' and cultivate more subtle, evasive tactics. And Prue's death warns that Mrs. Ramsay's role as generator of life is not immediately available to the next generation. If it is to be sustained, it can only be so by indirection, by an apparent sidetracking that will in fact be the only way the main route can now be followed. After Mrs. Ramsay's death, sexual penetration threatens death to her



successors.

Lily's defence against this phallic threat to the integration of the ego is her painting, which allows her to escape from the male 'fangs' (159): 'it had flashed upon her that she would move the tree to the middle, and need never marry anybody' (271). It is Lily's profession as painter that affords her this 'enormous exultation', allowing her to evade penetration by in a sense taking her place among the penetrators themselves. Completing her painting is for Lily a symbol of achieving full access to her profession, and it therefore exalts her and saves her from the 'crowbar' of the bullying male phallus (159). Torn though she is between her own stance and the conventional values she has internalized, Lily at last breaks painfully beyond the socially given definitions of femininity. Though at one level she responds strongly to female submission, regarding 'the glow, the rhapsody, the self-surrender...on so many women's faces' as 'the most supreme bliss of which human nature was capable', she also dryly admits that 'the reason of it escaped her' (233). Not admitting vaginal jouissance, Lily cannot imitate them; 'this is not what we want', she concludes, 'there is nothing more tedious, puerile, and inhumane than love' (160).

Though Lily attempts to catch the essence of Mrs. Ramsay in her painting, she has a persistent fear that artistic representation will freeze the flow of living, leaving her with a picture that might be as reductive as one of Mr. Ramsay's own angular essences. Recent feminist theory throws light on this fear of hers by suggesting that representation is only possible at the expense of the body - both one's own body ('the inadequate name of some uncommanded diversity of drives and contradictions'<sup>24</sup>) and the body of the mother. To enter the symbolic order involves abandoning the maternal body and repressing polymorphous desires. Before she exchanges 'the fluidity of life for the concentration of painting', Lily suffers 'a few moments of nakedness' as if she were 'an unborn soul, a soul reft of body, hesitating on some

windy pinnacle and exposed without protection' (245). Lily's soul is bodiless in a double sense. It is 'reft of body' in that it has been torn away from the maternal body into the order of representation, yet it is also 'unborn', that is, hovering on the verge of that incarnation which will be the physical work and substance of the painting itself. Flinching in this agony of exposure, she wonders whether 'it was in her nature, or in her sex'(245), whether she is a lone exception or the representation of her gender. Feminist theory would suggest the latter view: 'the conflict is always between body...and Power, between body and Law, between body and Phallus, even between body and Body. The second term in each pair is a finished, fixed representation. The first that which falls short of that representation'.<sup>25</sup> But if the body can never be entirely excluded from the realm of the written, it is more obviously at work in the field of painting. Urged by 'a curious physical sensation'(244), Lily draws her first stroke on the canvas, and she sustains her painting by 'a dancing rhythmical movement' (244). This rhythmic ebb and flow, like tone and colour, constitutes a key element in the Kristevan semiotic, that shifting configuration of somatic impulses which is more archaic than language. Painting is always a network of conventions of representation, but its very physicality gives it an unusual closeness to the body; as sticky, viscous substance, oil paint may carry psychoanalytical impulses connected to the bodily substances and secretions of infantile experience. Presenting themselves within the signifying activity, rhythm and its related semiotic impulses can alone traverse the gulf between body and representation, maternal body and patriarchal Law. 'With some rhythm which was dictated...by what she saw' (246), Lily can successfully reconcile fluidity with concentration: 'while her hand quivered with life, this rhythm was strong enough to bear her along with it on its current' (246).

Unlike her author, Lily does not have to struggle directly with the



order of language in her pursuit of representation. Yet even so it in a sense troubles her as Tansley's mocking words ring in her mind: 'women can't paint, can't write'(247). Because it substitutes a sign for the immediacy of a reality, language distances precisely that which it was supposed to make present: 'how could one express in words these emotions of the body? express that emptiness there?...It was one's body feeling, not one's mind.' (274-275) Lily is a more complete empiricist than Mr. Ramsay himself. She implicitly rejects Kant's demonstration of the creative role of the mind in perception, its imposition of categories on its unformed raw material: 'what she wished to get hold of was that very jar on the nerves, the thing itself before it has been made anything' (297). In her distrust of language, Lily differs somewhat from Mrs. Ramsay herself, and this may be related to the varying historical contexts of the two women's lives. Mrs. Ramsay's trust in fictions and tropes is sustained by the solid Victorian routine in which she exists. Her faith in the vagaries of language is the obverse of the rigid social environment that sustains her. Such social props have failed Lily, they have been destroyed by the First World War. The social guarantees of language are no longer to be trusted, and only one's own immediate experience can prevent the dispersal of language into inflated rhetoric and insincerity. This linguistic rappel à l'ordre was the experience of a whole young generation. After being enticed into war by the rousing patriotic rhetoric of its elders, it had come face to face with the brutal realities of year-long trench-warfare, mustard gas, and so on. The disjunction between signifier and signified was lived bitterly on the pulses. Rhetoric was discredited by being associated with the dulce et decorum<sup>26</sup> of an older political generation. One index of this crisis of language is T. E. Hulme's desire in his Imagist poetry to 'hand over sensations bodily',<sup>27</sup> an ambition Lily herself shares, and it is this generational experience which, I suggest, constitutes the grounds for Lily's suspicion of language - grounds over which the text itself,

however, is inexplicit.

The text's most vivid image of Lily's aching physical longing for Mrs. Ramsay is the 'mutilated body' (278) of the fish whose side is cut to be used for bait before it is thrown back into the sea during Mr. Ramsay's boat journey. Immediately after, Lily herself cries out to Mrs. Ramsay as her 'pain increased' and she plunges 'into the waters of annihilation' (278). The cutting out of substance from the side of the fish seems to be a latent allusion to Adam's loss of the rib from his side in creation. Lily is cast in the Adamic role, painfully losing her physical pith in the imminent creation of her work of art. The parallel from Genesis is also appropriate in that Lily/Adam represents mind, while Eve/Mrs. Ramsay represents the fleshy attractiveness of the body. Mrs. Ramsay's beauty proves as difficult to handle for Lily as Eve's did to Adam, yet its effects for her are curiously like those we would have expected to see associated with pure mind itself: 'Beauty...came too readily, came too completely. It stilled life - froze it' (273). An excess at the level of the signifier may thus be as damaging as Mr. Ramsay's reductions of objects into 'angular essences' pared of all excess. To appreciate too much the 'sumptuousness' of the signifier is not after all the opposite of the hermeneutic reduction into a lean and hungry essence; it is rather an alternative manifestation of a common tactlessness on the part of the interpreter. Surfaces are valued by Woolf, and Mr. Ramsay is wrong to neglect them, but still more valuable is that moment when they seem at last to render up an inner depth. Truth is an unveiling, as when - all too briefly - 'divine goodness had parted the curtain' (198) in 'Time Passes'. As painter, Lily has an acute eye for sensuous detail, yet she also fears that such vivid physical surfaces might be 'like curves and arabesques flourishing round a centre of complete emptiness' (275); she yearns for the moment when 'beauty would roll itself up' (277).



Curtains can be drawn or, more actively, truth may press rupturingly through them. Lily imagines that if Mr. Carmichael had spoken, 'a little tear would have rent the surface of the pool. And then? Something would emerge. A hand would be shoved up, a blade would be flashed' (276). Lily's allusion is to the tale of King Arthur. The blade is thus not, as it were, Peter Walsh's pen-knife; it is held by a woman, the Lady of the Lake of Arthurian legend, who would here of course be Mrs. Ramsay. Later Lily will reflect that at such moments, when the surfaces of daily habit are in abeyance, she feels 'something emerge. Life was most vivid then' (294). This emergence is as frightening as a wielded blade and as desirable as one's most intimately precious 'treasures' (199). This blade that tears through the surface in the hand of the Lady of the Lake can be read in terms of the 'maternal phallus'.<sup>28</sup> Mrs. Ramsay is seen as the ultimate source of order by Lily; she is indeed the object of the latter's transference: 'In Lacanian terms, the silent interlocutor...is the subject presumed to know, the object of transference, the phallic Mother, in command of the mysterious processes of life, death, meaning and identity.'<sup>29</sup> Lily leans against Mrs. Ramsay, seeking some inner secret: 'she knew knowledge and wisdom were stored in Mrs. Ramsay's heart' (83). I have already noted aspects of the phallic imagery that attaches to Mrs. Ramsay (see above p. 30), and Mrs. Ramsay pitied 'men always as if they lacked something' (133), that is to say, it is she who possesses the phallus. Lily attributes a formidable authority to the older woman: 'the astonishing power that Mrs. Ramsay had over one. Do this, she said, and one did it. Even her shadow at the window with James was full of authority' (271). It is perhaps Julia Kristeva who has most valuably emphasised the difficulties posed by this recognition of the mother's 'phallus': 'that every subject poses him/herself in relation to the phallus has been understood. But that the phallus is the mother: it is said, but here we are all arrêtés...by this "truth"'.<sup>30</sup>

When Lily reflects that Mrs. Ramsay 'was irresistible. Always she

got her own way in the end' (157), she feels a deep grudge against this formidable phallic authority and power. But, according to Jacques Lacan, the phallus 'can play its role only when veiled',<sup>31</sup> and hence Mrs. Ramsay must be veiled beneath the 'cover of beauty', to which she adds a tantalizing gift for silence: 'then she was reserved. Nobody knew exactly what had happened to her' (300). Provoking gossip and speculation - 'what was there behind it?' - she acquires all the more significance by her twinned loveliness and unforthcomingness. She becomes the Lacanian 'subject presumed to know', in command of the mysterious processes of life and identity. Accordingly, 'directly she went a sort of disintegration set in' (173), as is fully evidenced in 'Time Passes' after her death.

Though death seems to be a defeat for Mrs. Ramsay, consigning the values she represents definitively to the past, it in fact turns out in a sense to be the very subtlest of her triumphs. The folds of Mrs. Ramsay's shawl loosen one after another as time passes. Thus the text renders the dissolution of metaphor by the unfolding of Mrs. Ramsay's shawl, but the very language it uses to tell the dissolution of metaphor is worthy of Mrs. Ramsay's own metaphorical exaggeration: 'once in the middle of the night with a roar, with a rupture, as after centuries of quiescence, a rock rends itself from the mountain and hurtles crashing into the valley, one fold of the shawl loosened and swung to and fro' (201-2, 206). After her successful dinner party she thinks about Paul and Minta whom she had matched. 'They would...come back to this night; this moon; this wind; this house: and to her too. It flattered her...to think how, wound about in their hearts, however long they lived she would be woven' (175). She reflects triumphantly that this entire scene would be revived again in their lives. A relevant parallel - with gender transposed - can be drawn with Freud's myth of the murder of the primal father in Totem and Taboo.



Reserving all the women for himself, the father is killed by the jealous sons, but he in fact turns out to be far stronger dead than alive. Feeling guilt as well as liberation in his death, the brothers internalize their dead father, granting him a reign more thorough than the actual man himself could ever have achieved. Mrs. Ramsay herself seems to have a dim premonition that, as a sort of primal mother, she too will be internalized by her survivors, guiding them from within rather than more chancily manipulating them from without. Most of the characters in the novel experience enough impulses of irritation or hostility towards Mrs. Ramsay alive to lay the groundwork for a sense of guilt once she is dead. There is a notable absence of mourning for her, as if Mr. Ramsay's stricken histrionics had left everyone else in a state of emotional numbness. 'What did she feel?' Lily wonders on her first morning at the summer house, 'Nothing, nothing...'(225). Indeed, if she feels anything it is anger, blaming Mrs. Ramsay for her sudden death and for leaving her in a confusion that renders her unable to paint.<sup>32</sup>

Mrs. Ramsay is Lily's vicarious mother, determined to drive this difficult 'daughter' into the feminine role which she herself plays so perfectly as wife and mother. Here is the very heart of conflict between the two women, for Mrs. Ramsay is the 'Angel in the House' whom Lily must kill so that she can establish her own identity as a new woman, professional, unmarried, independent. In 1931 Woolf argued that, in her experience, killing the Angel in the House was essential for a woman to become a writer. 'Immensely charming', 'utterly unselfish', excelling in 'the difficult arts of family life', sacrificing herself daily, this Angel is a phantom woman to be found in every Victorian middle class household. Woolf summarizes her credo: 'Be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of our sex. Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own'(CE,2:285). This might stand as Mrs. Ramsay's own manifesto: she flatters and deceives her husband(TL,65), 'disliked anything that reminded her that she had been

seen sitting thinking'(108), allows Mr. Ramsay to 'exaggerate her ignorance'(187). In her 1931 paper Woolf declared that she had had to kill this angel: 'My excuse, if I were to be had up in a court of law, would be that I acted in self-defence. Had I not killed her she would have killed me'(CE,2:286). Lily must make a similarly 'murderous' self-assertion. Mrs. Ramsay 'cared not a fig for her painting'(TL,80), declares that 'she must...they all must marry', and it is only Lily's hardwon confidence in her painting that allows her to affirm her spinsterhood as she at last 'stand[s] up to Mrs. Ramsay'(271). Painting on the lawn, Lily rejects Mr. Ramsay's demand for sympathy, she refuses to identify with the feminine role Mrs. Ramsay would gladly have played. At the dinner party Lily, asked for help by Mrs. Ramsay, had had to accept this feminine role in relation to Tansley; though she feels that 'she had not been sincere'(144), Mrs. Ramsay's pressure causes her to renounce 'for the hundred and fiftieth time'(143). Ramsay's pressure is now inexorable, yet Lily merely draws her skirts closer round her ankles; instead of floating 'off instantly upon some wave of sympathetic expansion...she remained stuck'(234). At the same time, however, the degree of Lily's psychic autonomy should not be over-estimated. Like Freud's mythical father, Mrs. Ramsay exercises a fuller sway in death than life. Lily sees her rejection of the role of Angel in the House as constituting self-murder as well as an overthrow of her own femininity: 'not a woman, but a peevish, ill-tempered, dried-up old maid presumably'(234). 'Presumably', as I have suggested, denotes a distance, but Lily can sustain it only intermittently. Viewing herself as 'not a woman', she is confusing her own femaleness with a socially produced 'femininity', but this is in the first place a confusion and then imposition that her own culture insists on. Her society can only interpret affirmations of female difference outside its code of the feminine as madness, invisibility, non-existence. Earlier, Lily had



pleaded for 'her own exemption from the universal law' of reproduction: 'she liked to be herself; she was not made for that'(81). Again there is an elision of terms - between a need to reproduce which is 'universal' in the sense that the race will expire unless it is fulfilled, and the socially specific definitions of how and in what manner that need shall be performed. Though the content (child birth) is constant, the form is always historically produced. Lily emphatically rejects the form, which is the ideology of the Victorian Angel in the House, but so deep is her cultural conditioning, that she cannot distinguish the content from it. She abjures motherhood as well as 'angelic-ness', a decision which shows how deeply the act of rebellion is constrained by the very society it seeks to transcend.

The first part of To the Lighthouse valorizes Mrs. Ramsay over her husband, but the final section articulates the necessity for the 'daughter' to reject the mother (as far as she is able) without, however, merely returning to a position undifferentiated from that of the father himself. The daughter is always in danger of being engulfed by the mother. There is 'a structural weakness in the distinction between a girl and her mother', notes Jane Gallop in Feminism and Psychoanalysis: 'woman needs language, the paternal, the symbolic order, to protect herself from the lack of distinction from the mother'.<sup>33</sup> That 'astonishing power that Mrs. Ramsay had over one'(271) may be sheer paralysis and must be resisted. In this necessity there perhaps lies a further ambivalence of the First World War. It is a tragic loss of full meaning, yet it also overthrows the intimidating parents, affording one a chink of freedom through which one can seek an autonomy of one's own. Paul and Minta's marriage is in Mrs. Ramsay's terms a failure, yet it has nonetheless entered a new, interesting phase: 'we can over-ride her wishes, improve away her limited, old-fashioned ideas'(269). Mrs. Ramsay's views of marriage are now 'incongruous'. 'Triumphing'(269) over Mrs. Ramsay, as the latter had previously done over her husband,

Lily reflects that: 'It has all gone against your wishes. They're happy like that; I'm happy like this. Life has changed completely'(269).

Woman needs language and the symbolic order to protect herself from the potential lack of differentiation from the mother. But at the same time this patriarchal order is precisely the law that commands her to be like the mother. Children of both sexes must turn from their first love-object, the mother, but the boy turns away only 'provisionally'. He cannot possess the mother, but his adult love object will be of the same sex as her. The little girl, however, must turn from the mother to the father. This overcoming of the Oedipus complex in identification with the role of the parent of the same sex is enacted by James and Cam in the boat trip to the Lighthouse. After his long Oedipal hatred of Mr. Ramsay, James finally realises that 'they alone knew each other'(284), and he begins to regard himself as inheritor to the Father: '"We are driving before a gale - we must sink," he began saying to himself, half aloud exactly as his father said it'(312). In reward, James is recognised by the father when Mr. Ramsay praises his steering. Witnessing this, Cam reflects, 'You've got it at last. For she knew that this was what James had been wanting'(316). Cam is initially tempted ('this extraordinary temptation'(261-262)) to yield to the Father's speech by accepting his naming of the dog for her. But if she resists, it is only because her brother already occupies the father's role for her: 'with the tablets of eternal wisdom laid open on his knee', James urges her to '"Resist him"'(260). But 'no one attracted her more'(262) than Mr. Ramsay, and she will at last put herself in the place of the mother and accept him as love-object. She too becomes caught in the speech of the Father: 'she murmured, dreamily, half asleep, how we perished, each alone'(293). Yet the episode has a curious disjunction of form and content, enacting the oldest of stories - resolution of the Oedipal complex - in a highly atypical situation - a boat sailing from



the Hebrides to the Lighthouse. Society's most familiar, indeed formative, gesture is projected out to its frontiers, as an enterprising quest into the unknown. The effect of this is ambivalent. On the one hand, it dramatically highlights the Oedipal resolution in the intensity of its focus (three figures on a small boat) and in the heroism of the quest motif. But, on the other, it implies that this resolution is only possible in these unique circumstances, in what now seems an unusual 'laboratory' experiment in human emotions. Cam and James will reproduce the Ramsayan roles in the next generation, but they are isolated figures, while the 'mainland' belongs to Lily and her painting.

If the first adventure of Virginia Woolf's professional life was to kill the Angel in the House, the second has yet to be achieved: 'telling the truth about my own experiences as a body'(CE, 2:288). Woolf doubts whether any woman has solved it yet, but the full reason for this is deeper than the contingent fact of the social censorship she points to. Since the symbolic order is constituted by the very repression of the somatic, to seek to 'express' the body is to transgress the limits of representation. Lily's near-impossible desire to articulate 'these emotions of the body'(274) risks subverting the symbolic and precipitating madness or even death. In the physical pain of this effort, Lily only just stays on this side of the boundary: 'Heaven be praised...She had not obviously taken leave of her senses. No one had seen her step off her strip of board into the waters of annihilation. She remained a skimpy old maid, holding a paint-brush on the lawn'(278). Her problem is 'how to connect this mass on the right with that on the left'(86), to 'achieve that razor edge of balance between two opposite forces; Mr. Ramsay and the picture'(296). Lily's difficulty is located in that infinitesimal distance 'from conception to work'; her 'demons' lurk in the 'moment's flight between the picture and her canvas'(34), which ideally should reconcile the fluidity of life and 'the concentration of painting'(245). Without the symbolic order - representation,

identification with the father - then the 'conception' or inner picture, which is also the body, will be forever muted, and yet the former is at the same time the very force that represses the later. Mr. Ramsay must be one element in that razor-edge 'balance' which will be the completed painting, yet every time he comes near 'ruin approached, chaos approached'(229). Lily's description of her aesthetic ideal may also be taken as a self-reflexive statement of the novel's own aspiration: 'Beautiful and bright it should be on the surface, feathery and evanescent...but beneath the fabric must be clamped together with bolts of iron. It was to be a thing you could ruffle with your breath; and a thing you could not dislodge with a team of horses'(264). This is clearly a version of the simultaneously solid and free-floating clouds in Mrs. Dalloway. Lily is in the double-bind of needing representation and the Law of the Father to distance herself from the (unrepresentable) mother, yet finding that the symbolic endlessly defers that full, unmediated jouissance which she also desires, that 'very jar on the nerves, the thing itself before it has been made anything'(297). To this degree, Lily is in accord with Mr. Ramsay. Whereas she hopes to surprise the bodily intuition into giving up its secret before it is caught in the toils of signification, Mr. Ramsay seeks to press signification to its limit where it will finally yield the philosophical 'thing in itself'. Lily is, as it were, a pre-social, Mr. Ramsay a post-social empiricist. Both may in this respect be contrasted with Mrs. Ramsay. Accepting the necessary materiality of language, the latter knows 'the inadequacy of human relationships, that the most perfect was flawed'(66), always impeded and deferred by signification. Mrs. Ramsay knows the impossibility of speaking 'truth', knows that the human subject is always caught up in 'lies' and 'exaggerations' which slip into one's language: 'she never could say what she felt'(190).

It is no accident that in her desperation Lily turns to



Mr. Carmichael for help. He alone in the novel is indifferent to Mrs. Ramsay's power; since he lacks nothing, she can get no purchase upon him; 'Mrs. Ramsay would ask him...wouldn't he like a coat, a rug, a newspaper? No, he wanted nothing'(299-300). 'Always content and dignified'(150), Mr. Carmichael may be regarded as enviably in possession of the phallus. He does not suffer that 'splitting' of the subject which is the condition of the subject's entry into the symbolic order and which endlessly defers presence. Mr. Carmichael, in contrast, is 'gorged with existence'(274). He strikes Lily as in possession of an infinite depth of wisdom all the more impressive for its inscrutability. He is even associated, as I have already noted, with the glimpsed possibility of ultimate meaning: 'one could almost fancy that had Mr. Carmichael spoken, a little tear would have rent the surface of the pool. And then? Something would emerge'(276). As an artist, he has an affinity both to Lily, who moves the canvas 'close enough for his protection'(229) from Mr. Ramsay, and to Mrs. Ramsay as composer of social tableaux. Over the fruit bowl at dinner they had achieved a brief spark of mutual recognition: 'looking together united them'(151). Carmichael presides over both the landing at the Lighthouse and the completion of Lily's painting, and his presence suggests the unsatisfactoriness of the novel's offered resolution. The text invests him with a considerable amount of pomp and circumstance; he is 'an old pagan God' with a trident(319), a Druidic bard with 'a long white robe'(172) improvised out of a table napkin. Yet apart from chanting the poem at dinner Mr. Carmichael never speaks; moreover, his consciousness is never rendered from the inside in the novel. I suggest that this is because he embodies an impossibility, representing simultaneously the endless deferral involved in the practice of art and the present, full possession of the phallus. Each one of these aspects of Carmichael cancels the other, yet the novel insists he has both. It is therefore unable to 'realize' him, and gives him an inflated external grandeur to compensate for its inability to flesh out

his inner life. Carmichael is an absence or blank in the text; he marks the site of a desirable but contradictory resolution to the tug-of-war between body and representation.

Lily at last completes her picture: 'as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre'(320). Left and right sides, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, the symbolic and somatic, are joined and divided in a single stroke, and the crucial issue is which way the stress falls here. Just before drawing the line, Lily had looked at the steps and confirmed that 'they were empty'. Yet 'somebody'- 'whoever it was stayed still inside'(309) - casts a shadow over the steps exactly as Mrs. Ramsay would have done. It is through this 'somebody' that Lily has her vision, reaching a definite signified (Mrs. Ramsay) which is the mere effect of the indeterminate signifier, the anonymous shadow. The signified turns out to be dependent on the signifier that should be its mere prop. In general, a shadow is the trace of a presence which precedes it, but it does not operate in this usual way in Lily's vision: there the presence or vision is secondary to the trace itself. This is the very principle of the symbolic order, and I propose to read Lily's line as an allegorical statement of the Saussurian algorithm  $[\frac{S}{S}]$ , which for Lacan denotes the insurpassable separation of the subject of conscious discourse from the unconscious. Despite the general euphoria of its last pages, the novel itself quietly retains certain key qualifications of Lily's vision: 'as if she saw it clear for a second' (emphasis added). The dream of identity between left and right sides, body and symbolic order, persists, but the inescapable fact of their alienation is also acknowledged. Lily's final line is as ambivalent as the Phallus itself, which is both disjunction and copula at once. Anika Lemaire argues that the phallus is 'a copula - a hyphen - in the evanescence of its erection - the signifier par excellence of the impossible identity'.<sup>34</sup> The novel cannot end on full presence, but must



note its passing: 'I have had my vision'. If this is in one sense loss, it is also a sort of liberation, bleak but real, for the vision is Lily's bond to Mrs. Ramsay. It is tragically brief but also a debt settled. Mrs. Ramsay has vanished inaccessibly into the past, fixed in the representation rather than lived on the very pulses of the younger woman, but this also constitutes a freedom for Lily, who can now perhaps cast off her fixation with Mrs. Ramsay and move on.<sup>35</sup>

Lily's line is also a Lighthouse, and the Lighthouse is in turn 'a central line down the middle of the book to hold the design together'. Lily's line and the Lighthouse coincide in a way reminiscent of Mrs. Ramsay's own projections of auto-affection into the outside world earlier in the book. But this is only a reminiscence and not an identity. With her death, a kind of 'division of labour' has set in. Whereas Mrs. Ramsay's auto-affection passed through the Lighthouse on its circular journey back upon itself, Mr. Ramsay must physically go to the Lighthouse, while Lily draws the line which coincides with it.<sup>36</sup> Woolf insists that 'I meant nothing by the Lighthouse'; it is an empty signifier. At the start of this chapter I described it as a 'symbol of symbolism', for that is the 'subjective' aspect of the Lighthouse's 'objective' role as signifier. Provokingly empty, it leads to hermeneutic efforts to motivate it, to turn it into symbol; Woolf 'trusted that people would make it the deposit for their own emotions - which they have done'. Lily's line represents an unsurpassable bar between lived experience and the symbolic order, which always objectively exists, but comes to subjective consciousness as the result of a historical 'fall' from the plenitude of the Ramsays to the dearth suffered by the post-war generation. It is the necessary condition of the subject as such, and it reacts back to interrogate the symbolic visions of the first half of the text. The novel's ambivalent attitude towards this bar or gap is finally grounded in the daughter's fraught relationship to the mother. Mrs. Ramsay's death is the bleak loss of the

possibility of total meaning, yet it also reveals an arbitrariness in the sign which reduces even Mrs. Ramsay's impressive symbols into mere fictional constructs with no compelling authority over the next generation.



## CHAPTER V: ORLANDO

On its publication in 1928 Orlando proved 'as Leonard said, the turning point in Virginia's career as a successful novelist' (QB, 2:140). Her financial anxieties were ended by its commercial success and popularity, and she could at last secure a 'room of her own'.<sup>1</sup> None the less, among her critics Orlando has been perhaps the most neglected of her novels. Quentin Bell's judgement is representative: 'I think she saw well enough that Orlando was not "important" among her works' (QB, 2:138). 'Not...important among my works' was, indeed, Woolf's own assessment of the novel in her diary (WD, 128), and Bell and a number of other critics seem to take this authorial judgement as self-evidently true. 'The book itself was, from a publisher's point of view, perfect,' Bell continues, in a rather denigrating tone, as if no work which was successful in market terms could possibly have literary value. He summarises the feelings of the reading public as follows: 'Here was a work by a highbrow -- a "difficult" novelist -- which nevertheless was easy, amusing, and straightforward in its narrative' (QB, 2:140). This indicates the pattern of the book's subsequent critical reception. Precisely because Orlando is not difficult, not typically 'Woolfian', some critics have dismissed it. Meanwhile the very fact of its humour and straightforwardness have led other critics to focus on the biographical origins of Orlando rather than study of the text as artefact. Instead of criticism we are offered biographical gossip or scandal or speculation, and such critics thus ironically reproduce the very responses of a reading public they deplore. Yet the homosexual love affair from which the novel springs at the same time causes them to flinch embarrassedly away from it. This 'simple' work thus becomes a difficult book, a thorny text to handle critically, finally prompting essays with titles like 'Why is Orlando difficult?'. In this essay J.J. Wilson records an amusing fact: 'Professors like to include Orlando on reading lists as a kind of literary aphrodisiac for their unaroused students'.<sup>2</sup> This is true enough; even readers who

usually find Woolf's work intolerable often enjoy Orlando ('of all Virginia's novels the one that comes nearest to sexual, or rather homosexual feeling' (QB,2:118). This already suggests how aberrant this novel is from what is regarded as the 'quintessence' of Woolf's literary project: 'Orlando has a different quality from all Virginia Woolf's other novels'.<sup>3</sup> Many critics' unease focuses on its personal origin and passion, as when Nigel Nicholson describes it as the 'most charming love letter in literature', or when H. Lee writes that 'Orlando...is a personal offering, dedicated to Vita Sackville-West in a spirit of love and fascination and also of irony' (138).<sup>4</sup> In so doing, they underestimate the degree to which such passions are mediated by impersonal literary forms and conventions. Another fact which makes Orlando troubling for its critics is that The Waves, which is generally regarded as 'really' the next book after To the Lighthouse, had already germinated in Woolf's mind when she was writing Orlando, indeed, even before the completion of To the Lighthouse.<sup>5</sup> With the author's own disparaging description of it as 'a joke', 'farce', 'a writer's holiday', 'an escapade', (WD, 105, 117, 118, 124), Orlando seems all the more a mere 'intrusion': one critic contends 'Orlando had interrupted the stream of inspiration which was to lead to The Waves'.<sup>6</sup> Hence many critics' omission of Orlando from what they construe as the main current of Woolf's literary work. In order to appreciate Orlando justly, we need to probe into the psychic mechanisms of the author's defensive definition of it as 'a joke' and refuse to take her words at face value, and equally to stop regarding it as a mere 'personal offering' to her lover.<sup>7</sup>

We should not confound 'joke' with 'insignificance' even though the author herself seems to invite us to do so, for Freud had already revealed in 1905 that behind a joke or within the relief gained from a joke, there resides the truth of the unconscious.<sup>8</sup> The intensity of the 'will-to-joke' which Woolf records in her diary suggests some significant



psychic impulse. 'Well but Orlando was the outcome of a perfectly definite, indeed overmastering, impulse. I want fun. I want fantasy. I want (this was serious) to give things their caricature value...to write a history, say of Newnham or the women's movement, in the same vein. The vein is deep in me - at least sparkling, urgent' (WD, 136) (emphasis added). Curiously, two layers are inscribed in this diary entry: surface (fun, play) and depth (urgent, overmastering), but they interbreed in strange ways. A 'serious' drive towards 'caricature' is perhaps paradoxical, and we can certainly then hardly any longer accept the firm and stable binary opposition which allows critics to deprecate Orlando as 'unserious'. In our ordinary way of construing this opposition, we assume that seriousness is primary and that play or joke is secondary and derivative, just as (a related case) we assume that literal meaning precedes the 'transfer' of meaning in the metaphor. Yet Woolf's diary entries on Orlando constantly overturn this assumption, affirming instead the primacy of play. Though she started the novel as a joke, she involuntarily became serious. Thus her worries: 'Yes, it's done - Orlando - begun on 8th October, as a joke; and now rather too long for my liking. It may fall between stools, be too long for a joke, and too frivolous for a serious book' (WD, 124). 'The truth is I expect I began it as a joke and went on with it seriously. Hence it lacks some unity' (WD, 128). The constant repetition of 'jokiness' itself alerts us to forces operating here that are stronger than our usual, attenuated notion of 'play' will admit. And in her entry in the diary on 20th December 1927 Woolf tells us that Orlando came into being through some uncontrollable force: 'How extraordinarily unwilling by me but potent in its own right...Orlando was! as if it shoved everything aside to come into existence' (WD, 120).

What is this 'overmastering impulse', this 'definite' necessity, which drove Woolf to have 'a joke'? Her own explanation emerges in the diary. Recording for the first time an idea for some literary project of

the fantastic (she named it 'The Jessamy Brides') - 'fantasy', 'sapphism', 'satire' - she explains: 'I feel the need of an escapade after these serious poetic experimental books whose form is always so closely considered...it will rest my head before starting the very serious, mystical poetical work which I want to come next' (WD, 105).<sup>9</sup> This account dovetails with her categorization of 'The Satirists and Fantastics' between 'The Psychologists' and 'The Poets' in her essay 'Phases of Fiction' written contemporaneously with Orlando. In it, too, she argues for 'a craving for relief' after the confused feelings which psychologically orientated literature rouses in the reader: 'The mind feels like a sponge saturated full with sympathy and understanding; it needs to dry itself, to contract upon something hard. Satire and the sense that the satirist gives us that he has the world well within his grasp, so that it is at the mercy of his pen, precisely fulfil our needs' (CE, 2:89). Satire is appreciated for its power to master reality. The writers of satire and the fantastic work in 'freedom' in their 'changed attitudes toward reality' (CE, 2:90-91), over which they have the upper hand; they do not labour 'under the oppression of omniscience' (CE, 2:90) like the psychologists. This gives the reader too a sense of freedom. Maria DiBattista is the only critic who gives full recognition to Woolf's 'overmastering impulse' and argues that the play which Woolf practises is never simply gratuitous, nonutilitarian or unserious: 'Both the urgency and seriousness of caricature as a species of Woolf's comic, playful expression in Orlando springs from an aggressive impulse directed against all she perceives as threatening to the integrity and freedom of the self - the pretentious, the powerful, the potentially tyrannical'.<sup>10</sup> In order to give a full assessment of Orlando, it is necessary to probe into the particular constraints against which Woolf's fantasy protests, and from which it is generated, for in Rosemary Jackson's account of the genre, fantasy attempts 'to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural



constraints: it is a literature of desire'.<sup>11</sup> What, then, is the desire which evokes an 'overmastering impulse' in Woolf to ward off the oppressions of reality, and which has to be immediately repressed by the author herself as a 'joke', and subsequently dismissed by critics as non-essential?

Woolf's first rudimentary idea of a fantasy was 'The Jessamy Brides', about 'two women, poor, solitary at the top of a house': 'satire and wildness' with 'sapphism' suggested (WD, 105). Seven months later, this scheme had become Orlando. 'Vita; only with a change about from one sex to another' (WD, 116). Thus the idea about a fantasy for fun was from the very beginning twined with the themes of woman and sexuality. In this period Woolf was active in writing on feminist issues,<sup>12</sup> and the most substantial fruit of that concern was A Room of One's Own (published in 1929), which was based on lectures she gave at Cambridge immediately after the publication of Orlando. Since Woolf was thus stepping into her father's footsteps (he had been tutor at Trinity College), she can perhaps be regarded as acting out that change of sex which Orlando had already thematised, and at Cambridge too she was 'playful' where solemnity was more likely to have been expected.

As I suggested in my introduction, Woolf encounters a tension between her feminism and the aesthetic ideology of Symbolist modernism. For the Symbolist work of art, ideas or statements are taboo; a poem must not mean but be. Certainly, critics have overestimated the role of the modernist sensibility in Woolf, ignoring the counteracting, materialist motifs in her work. Yet it is nonetheless true that she remains to a degree entrapped within the modernist categories. Thus anything like a 'direct' expression of feminist anger, Woolf argues, introduces distortion and weakness into the work of art. In A Room of One's Own she points to 'an awkward break' in Jane Eyre, which she identifies more generally in 'Women and Fiction' as a characteristic of nineteenth century women novelists - the presence 'of someone resenting the

treatment of her sex and pleading for its rights' (CE, 2:144):

That is an awkward break, I thought...The continuity is disturbed. One might say...that the woman who wrote those pages had more genius in her than Jane Austen; but if one reads them over and marks that jerk in them, that indignation, one sees that she will never get her genius expressed whole and entire. Her books will be deformed and twisted. She will write in a rage where she should write calmly. She will write foolishly where she should write wisely. She will write of herself where she should write of her characters. She is at war with her lot. (RO, 104)

Female anger and ambition as a woman are the last thing Woolf wants to 'betray', whether in her non-fictional or fictional work. Hence the oblique approach to the issues and the playful style in both Orlando and A Room of One's Own. Elaine Showalter rightly points out the similarity of the techniques of these books: 'repetition, exaggeration, parody, whimsy, and multiple viewpoint'.<sup>13</sup> Woolf's playfulness, then, does not mean secondariness or unseriousness, but is a necessary detachment and disguise, a deliberate narrative politics by which she can express what she otherwise prohibits herself; that which the straightforward style cannot articulate within its legitimate confines. But if playfulness in a sense begins as a strategem, it ultimately attains a more radical value by which it subsumes 'seriousness', which then becomes a subordinate moment within it.

The most radical fantastic elements in Orlando are Orlando's immense life span and the sex-change in the middle of the book and Orlando's consequent androgynous character. According to Jackson, fantasy 'takes metaphorical constructions literally'.<sup>14</sup> Since Orlando lives more than three hundred years and at the end of the book is still only thirty-six, it is possible for the reader to reverse the course of fantasy, to 'naturalize' it as a metaphor for the tradition and ancestors which make the individual's existence possible. But the fantasy of sex-change and androgyny offers more resistance to any naturalizing attempt, for what could this sex-change and androgyny be a metaphor or allegory of?



Confusion of sexual divisions is offensive and unacceptable from a 'normal' viewpoint, as are all confusions of categories like life and death, the human and the animal. If, as Tzvetan Todorov points out, the fantastic cannot be placed alongside allegory or poetry, for it resists both the conceptualizations of the first and the metaphorical structures of the second, then the change of sex is the most fantastic aspect of Orlando.<sup>15</sup> However, if one admits that a human being is never purely and simply man or woman, that every individual has both 'feminine' and 'masculine' elements, then the sex-change is no longer a fantasy of the nonconceptual. Yet society and the men and women constituted in and through it do not accept this, and androgynous dispositions therefore have to be presented as fantasy and joke.<sup>16</sup>

Elaine Showalter's attack on Woolf is directed at precisely her so-called 'flight' into androgyny. 'Androgyny was the myth that helped her evade confrontation with her own painful femaleness and enabled her to choke and repress her anger and ambition'.<sup>17</sup> Showalter argues, contrary to Woolf's modernist ideology that makes anger and protest flaws in art, that a woman writer should completely immerse herself in 'the individual experience, with all its restriction of sex and anger and fear and chaos':

A thorough understanding of what it means, in every respect, to be a woman, could lead the artist to an understanding of what it means to be a man. This revelation would not be realized in any mystical way; it would result from daring to face and express what is unique, even if unpleasant, or taboo, or destructive, in one's own experience, and thus it would speak to the secret heart in all people.<sup>18</sup>

Though she criticises Woolf's androgynous artist for 'mystically transcend[ing] sex', Showalter's alternative is as mystical as Woolf's. Can the issues indeed be as simple as she optimistically suggests? Her last sentence perhaps already betrays the simplistic sentimentality of her argument.

The stridency of the revolt Showalter calls for entails a risk. The dominant, patriarchal culture might simply work, all the more powerfully, to eliminate women's 'restrictions of sex and anger and fear and chaos' in the name of 'insanity', 'illogicality', 'disorder'. Women need a more subtly resourceful strategy to let their indignation take effect in society. The relation of a woman writer to the dominant culture must be oblique. She cannot write completely outside the dominant culture and institutions, and yet as woman, she is alien to them. 'At once within this culture and outside it', as Mary Jacobus remarks, 'the woman writer experiences not only exclusion, but an internal split.'<sup>19</sup> This intricate mode of working at once within and outside culture 'challeng[es] its terms while necessarily working within them'. It is this difficult acrobatic feat of continually crossing the boundary of the dominant culture in pleasurable satire and fantasy that Woolf chose for Orlando and A Room of One's Own. Mary Jacobus suggests that women re-read Woolf's 'androgyny' in the light of this difficult challenge of at once transgressing the very ground on which we stand and yet necessarily working within it - 'a simultaneous enactment of desire and repression by which the split is closed with an essentially Utopian vision of undivided consciousness'.<sup>20</sup> The androgynous mind which Woolf dreams of as her ideal does not, as Showalter argues, flee into the a-sexual state of eunuchism, but is rather 'a constant alternation' between the position inside the dominant culture, on the side of the sign, and a 'position' outside. In Kristeva's words, 'an impossible dialectic: a permanent alternation: never the one without the other.'<sup>21</sup>

Critics such as DiBattista have suggested a certain continuity between To the Lighthouse and Orlando, seeing Lily's discovery of her 'mother' and making peace with her 'father' as anticipating the resolution of the dualism of male/female (aggressive/self-sacrificing, rational/emotional) which Orlando will then body forth quite literally in its sex-change. Yet Orlando's androgynous disposition does not in fact



emphasize the fusion of these two opposite characterizations of human being. This point is made startlingly clear by the fact that Nancy Topping Bazin's book omits Orlando completely despite its title and theme: Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision. For Orlando's androgyny offers no foothold to an argument that sees the androgynous vision as a mystical unification of the manic (female) and the depressive (male) view of the world. She interprets Woolf's androgyny simply as 'a certain equilibrium between the masculine and feminine visions.'<sup>22</sup> Yet the very fact that androgyny is broached again in Orlando suggests at the very least that any supposed 'resolution' in To the Lighthouse is less definitive than assumed.

At a key point in Orlando, Orlando and Shelmerdine suddenly cry to each other: "'You're a woman, Shel!" she cried. "You're a man, Orlando!" he cried'. The narrator underlines the bizarreness of this episode: 'Never was there such a scene of protestation and demonstration as then took place since the world began' (227). The change of sex is a defining moment for the fantasy of Orlando in that it shows the nature of fantasy itself, which I take to be the transgression of boundaries as a play with the limit, in other words, as the play of difference. Woolf had the idea of 'a change about from one sex to another' at the time she first conceived Orlando (WD, 116). Transgression of the boundary is the distinctive working principle of the fantastic; R. Jackson points out that the fantastic narrative does not operate metaphorically to produce a synthesizing image or a suddenly condensed symbol; it rather remains on the surface. In it one object, instead of standing for another, literally becomes that other, slides through the boundary into the other, 'in a permanent flux and instability'.<sup>23</sup> This superficiality and metonymical displacement is certainly the contrary of that depth and metaphoricity which Woolf usually aims consciously at in her fiction. In Orlando, she noted, she had purposely avoided 'difficulty': 'I did not

try to explore...I never got down to my depths' (WD, 136). She also intended to write 'all over hastily' (WD, 120). Jacques Lacan remarks: 'What do we have in metonymy other than the power to bypass the obstacles of social censure? This form...lends itself to the truth under oppression.'<sup>24</sup> The 'truth under oppression' which has to find metonymical expression in Orlando is the very notion of androgyny itself. Woolf cannot treat her androgynous vision metaphorically in her usual manner, for it is specially 'unthinkable'; it can be acceptable only as a joke. It verges too much on the comic or ribald to allow an earnest attempt to embody it in poetic metaphor. If one tries to give 'androgyny' any expression, it has to be done metonymically by 'a change about from one sex to another'; a man or woman slides into a woman or man as 'farce' (whence, presumably, the social phenomenon of comic 'drag'). Androgyny in Orlando is not a reconciliation that resolves the opposition, but the throwing of both sexes into a metonymic confusion of genders.

Before the radical transgression of the dividing line (Orlando's metamorphosis from man to woman), and as a kind of textual 'foreplay', many other instances of transgression occur. Orlando's sudden love for Sasha emerges prior to the division of gender, for when he first sees Sasha, he does not know whether the figure is a 'boy's or woman's' (36). Physical detail, 'whatever the name or sex', is obscured by an extraordinary seductiveness. Accordingly, Orlando's metaphors for Sasha are a pell-mell of categories. 'Images, metaphors of the most extreme and extravagant twined and twisted in his mind. He called her a melon, a pineapple, an olive tree, an emerald, and a fox in the snow' (36). As a man, Orlando automatically categorizes this desirable object as woman, as 'her' in a synaesthetic confusion of the senses: 'he did not know whether he had heard her, tasted her, seen her, or all three together' (37). Sasha represents otherness to him; she is a foreign woman with whom he cannot communicate except in French, which is a foreign tongue for both. 'There was something hidden' (45) in her, for her true origin is unknown



and shadowy: 'something rank in her, something coarse flavoured, something peasant born?' (50). It is the attraction of otherness; she is 'like nothing he had seen or known in England'; all the English 'words failed him. He wanted another landscape, and another tongue' (45). She represents all the exoticism of Rachel Vinrace's Voyage Out without the trouble of the voyage itself. Orlando is drawn to the uttermost limits of himself and beyond them; embraces are only possible (and thus also impossible) if the other is the other, on the other side of the boundary of the self. Orlando had almost despaired when he for a moment thought that Sasha was 'of his own sex': 'all embraces were out of the question' (37). Orlando is drawn out of 'his boyish clumsiness' (40) into 'his manhood' (39). Metamorphosis on a small scale has already happened: 'the change in Orlando himself was extraordinary' (40).

Urged by Sasha's complaint that 'It was like being in a cage' (42), Orlando takes her beyond the confines of the English court: 'the couple was often seen to slip under the silken rope, which railed off the Royal enclosure from the public part of the river and to disappear among the crowd of common people' (42). This act most 'outraged the Court and stung it in its tenderest part' (42). Ignoring the boundary of silken rope, Orlando and Sasha seek a passionate embrace in the farthest reaches of the frozen Thames. Orlando resolved 'to chase the flame, dive for the gem', to discard his familiar milieu (country, office and career), and to venture into an unknown barbarism, since Sasha is determined to live in Russia. Ignoring 'obstacles and hardships', he feels 'as if he had been hooked by a great fish through the nose and rushed through the waters unwillingly, yet with his own consent' (50). This passionate pursuit of a mysterious foreign woman, which overthrows all decorum and the boundaries of English court society, is appropriately situated in an exceptional moment of time produced by the sudden and unprecedented Great Frost, which gives England something of the primitive severity of Sasha's

own Russia. The routine business of life comes to a standstill, and instead 'London enjoy[s] a carnival of the utmost brilliancy' (34). We can link the novel's term 'carnival' to Jackson's account of the phenomenon (which in turn relies heavily on Mikhail Bakhtin): 'Carnival was a temporary condition, a ritualized suspension of everyday law and order'.<sup>25</sup> In the carnivalistic situation, in which free contact between ranks is permitted and sexual taboos are broken, Orlando and Sasha's affair is an 'improper' relationship. Sasha is not only foreign, but has 'something rank, something coarse flavoured, something peasant born' about her. She is so uncategorizable in terms of Orlando's social world that she is completely ambiguous; he cannot decide whether his 'sight' of Sasha 'in the arms of a common seaman', which was an utterly 'foul' thing, is fact or imagination. But it is in this carnivalistic atmosphere, this suspension of common sense and order, that Orlando's sexuality is at last liberated. Casting off 'his boyish clumsiness' (40), he knew 'for the first time...the delight of love' (43). In these pages Woolf's writing achieves its maximum sexual intensity, more so even than in the evocations of sexual rapture in Mrs. Dalloway, for that was merely Clarissa's memory, a brief flashback by a woman who remains a spiritual virgin troubled by her own frigidity.

The ice which 'did not melt with their heat' (43) will eventually thaw just before Orlando's planned elopement with Sasha. The freezing over of the river is simultaneously the suspension of law and order and a 'carnival' (34); 'a whole gay city'(58) has been erected on the ice. Carnival is a privileged time and space in which all barriers are dissolved, and is possible because of the suspension of the flow of ordinary time; it is in a sense another version of the 'timeless moments' of To the Lighthouse. For life to continue, this flow of time (history) has to be resumed: frozen for more than three months, the river suddenly regains its freedom and is now 'a race of turbulent yellow waters.' 'All was riot and confusion' (58), but this is a necessary violence to repress



the carnival before the resumption of the flow of the ordinary life. Because of this sudden end of the carnival, Orlando cannot after all transgress the limits of the court to embrace Sasha. He remains behind as Sasha, far out in the sea, flees to Russia, with the race of turbulent yellow waters washing down the frantic people between them. Its consummation thwarted, desire for otherness turns into revulsion: 'he hurled at the faithless woman all the insults that have ever been the lot of her sex. Faithless, mutable, fickle' (61). Sasha is cast beyond the swirling waters as an evil otherness - 'devil, adulteress, deceiver' (61). To understand her, Orlando has to wait until he himself can cross the gulf of gender into this other side.

Once the carnivalistic freedom is dissipated, Orlando is exiled from the Court in deep disgrace. He retires to his country house to begin a sedate life there, but first undergoes a trance-like seven day's sleep which submits his part in the passionate carnival world to repression; he wakes 'to have an imperfect recollection of his past life' (63). After an uneventful century on his estate the same pattern of transgression ('slipping out of a silken rope'), carnival and flood will be repeated, leading to Orlando's most radical transgression of all. What compels Orlando to take the first step outside his self-imposed confinement is an amorous incident with the Archduchess Harriet. The episode needs close scrutiny, for the text here contains curious and problematic twists. It is because Orlando is 'suddenly and violently overcome by passion of some sort that he has to leave the room' (107). The textual biographer defines this 'passion' - obviously physical desire - as the latter of Love's two inseparable faces, 'one white, the other black...one smooth, the other hairy' (108). This transformation of Love is the turning point of this episode: initially 'a bird of beauty' with 'soft plumage', it metamorphoses into 'the heaviest and foulest of the birds; which is the vulture' (108). Radiant Love turns into 'black, hairy, brutish' Lust,

'at the sight of the Archduchess presumably' (108), as the narrator informs us in a parenthesis. Yet this explanation is ambiguous. It implies that the Archduchess is rampantly lustful, and that Orlando flees from her hot desire. This interpretation is in part appropriate, since the Archduchess is taking the initiative here; but against it must be set other characterizations of her as well-mannered, gentle, even magnanimous. Earlier, for instance, she had been compared to 'a hare startled, but obdurate' (105). The narrator's phrase 'at the sight of...', however, suggests that the lurid transformation may take place within the person (Orlando) looking at the Archduchess rather than in or because of the latter herself. The 'black, hairy' countenance of Lust is that of Orlando's own male passion, which he then projects onto the Archduchess. Hence it is that, though he escapes her attentions, Orlando remains 'haunted every day and night by phantoms of the foulest kind' (109); he can flee the woman, but he cannot escape those aspects of his own self which he had projected onto her. When Orlando returns to England as a woman and again meets the Archduchess (now the Archduke), he reflects with a great sense of bathos that 'This was the eyrie of that obscene vulture - this the fatal fowl herself!' (161-2). Relieved of his own lurid projections, her earlier 'seduction' attempt now seems 'excessively flat' (162).

Who is here the pursuer and who the pursued? Orlando flees from England, but then the Archduchess is 'a hare that sits upright and glowers at its pursuer' (105), and since Orlando flees his own lustfulness, he might be said to be pursued by his own nature as (male) pursuer. This image of the sexual hunt was already prominent in the Sasha episode. Orlando abbreviates her name to Sasha 'because it was the name of a white Russian fox he had had as a boy' (43); she is thus the object of his amorous 'fox-hunt'. Yet the fox seems capable of doing as much damage as the hunter himself; his boyhood pet was 'a creature soft as snow, but with teeth of steel, which bit him so savagely' (43).



In fleeing the Archduchess, Orlando is fleeing from aspects of his own masculinity which he now denounces as disgusting (and which had earlier repelled Sasha). In this limited sense, then, Orlando's metamorphosis into a woman is already prefigured at the end of chapter two. But this fantastic transgression of the boundary between one sex and the other will actually take place in surroundings of radical otherness - the Eastern world of Constantinople, than which nothing is 'less like the counties of Surrey and Kent or the towns of London and Tunbridge Wells' (111).<sup>26</sup> The narrative pattern of chapter one - escape from the 'silken rope' of the usual boundaries - is repeated in chapter three. Between his diplomatic duties, which he performs diligently, Orlando sometimes, 'it is said...would pass out of his own gates...Then he would mingle with the crowd on the Galata Bridge' (114). The great celebration for the conferring of the Dukedom on Orlando is again a special time in which quotidian business is temporarily suspended, to the point where the people of Turkey expect a miracle. The British feel 'considerable uneasiness' that the imperialist order they had been imposing by 'the superiority of the British' over the 'ignorant' Easterners (117) might be subverted. Though the agitation at the party is quelled, that night Orlando marries a gypsy woman, as revealed later by a document left in the room. Subversion thus takes place on the personal rather than political level, in a marriage that violates imperialist canons of social and even racial decorum. Jackson argues that the 'Fantastic is preoccupied with limits, with limiting categories, and with their projected dissolution'.<sup>27</sup> Confronted with such 'transgressive impulses', the text, as if in deep embarrassment, shows a certain reluctance to proceed; Orlando falls into a trance again. In the world around him, the political transgression is achieved: in a 'terrible and bloody insurrection', 'The Turks rose against the Sultan' (122). The moment of the fantastic (reversal of sex) and political revolution occur

simultaneously, yet the relationship between them remains obscure, since the novel uses the latter only as a metonym for the former. Whether their relationship is necessary or contingent it remains impossible to say. The biographer then confronts the most embarrassing 'fact', though 'now again obscurity decends' (123), naturalised by the biographical inconvenience of burnt holes in the document.

Yet despite delays and resistances the biographer at last has to confess, to the sound of the trumpet's impetuous blaring of 'The Truth!', that when Orlando woke, 'he was a woman' (126), a sentence as ungrammatical as the transformation it records is bizarre. After a gap indicated by five asterisks, as if the only way to show the division of the sex were this hiatus, the novel describes the androgynous Orlando, though still referring to 'him': 'His form combined in one the strength of a man and a woman's grace' (126-7). Orlando's form is the image which the author has given to the non-conceptual, impossible figure of androgyny. Whereas his previous trance had served only to repress the extreme pain which his transgressions during the 'carnival' had caused him, this trance succeeds in dissolving the limits of gender. The change from a man into a woman is a castration, but it nevertheless 'seemed to have been accomplished painlessly and completely...' (127). Orlando's physical form alone alters: 'But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been. The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity. Their faces remained, as their portraits prove, practically the same' (127). Even his memory of the past remains intact. The only thing which makes Orlando recognize his/her new sexual identity is the sight of his/her own image in the mirror. He 'stood upright in complete nakedness' (126) and 'looked himself up and down in a long looking-glass, without showing any signs of discomposure' (127). The biographer's statements about Orlando's unaltered identity do not necessarily deny the difference between the sexes, but they do deny biologism. Orlando's biological



change from man to woman does not automatically and immediately entail a change of personality (even his physiognomy is not affected). Since Orlando has not yet started to live as woman in a specific context, he 'remain[s] precisely as he [has] been', but 'it altered their future.' His/her new sexuality is to be constructed from now on in historical, social and cultural contexts. The biographer dismisses 'biologists and psychologists' who will probably discuss Orlando's sexuality futilely and endlessly (127-8), for this text implies that sexuality is constructed, and not given in nature. In the latter half of the book, Orlando is constructed as a woman; and since sexuality is not presented as naturally given, Orlando's gender becomes a legal matter for the Court to decide. As Stephen Heath argues:

Sexuality is not given in nature but produced; the individual subject is not constructed from sexuality, sexuality is constructed in the history of the subject, with difference a function of that construction not its cause, a function which is not necessarily single (on the contrary) and which, a fortiori, is not necessarily the holding of the difference to anatomical difference (phallic singularity). Production, construction in the history of the subject, sexuality engages also from the beginning, and thereby, the social relations of production, classes, sexes.<sup>28</sup>

In the face of this mysterious change of sex, many people's reaction, from the 'naturalist' point of view, is to try to prove: '(1) that Orlando had always been a woman, (2) that Orlando is at this moment a man' (127). Curiously, these two contradictory positions are in a sense both true. Having lived as man, Orlando at this moment is still a man; s/he will have to learn to be a woman through the years to come. But the first argument also seems to be true on a totally different level, that is, as a kind of disguised confession on the part of the author. As a man, Orlando has never struck the reader as very masculine or virile. The very first sentence of the book - 'He - for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it' (15) - paradoxically suggests a certain doubt by its very

effort to efface any ambiguity on the issue. His beautiful adolescent figure and dreamy character can be construed as 'feminine' (his particular charm is his 'shapely legs'). It may well be that Orlando is in a sense a woman from the start. That there has been doubt on this point is proved by the housekeeper. When Orlando returns as a woman to her country house after the long absence in Turkey, Mrs. Grimsditch confides that 'she had always had her suspicions (here she nodded her head very mysteriously)...it was no surprise to her (here she nodded her head very knowingly)' (155).

After the change of sex, the erstwhile Ambassador becomes a gypsy in the mountains, as Woolf joins a long literary tradition that associates gypsies with anarchic liberation and energy. Unselfconscious about her change of sex and her new sexuality, she can remain as ambiguous as the Turkish coats and trousers she is wearing, 'which can be worn indifferently by either sex' (128). She does not yet need to behave according to a rigidly coded set of manners as woman in gypsy society, which constitutes another version of carnival: 'the gypsy women, except in one or two important particulars, differ very little from the gypsy men' (140). What is emphasised is that Orlando has now abandoned his longstanding 'important part in the public life of his country' (110). In the narrator's comical treatment of his duties, Orlando as a public figure emerges as a cross between two of the publicly active men in Mrs. Dalloway: Hugh Whitbread, with his devotion to tedious and empty official routine, and Peter Walsh, as practical colonial administrator. Orlando now admits frankly that all these tasks are odious, and praises the relaxed, natural life of the present moment. Her new-found views accord with the philosophy of the gypsies, who despise official, punctilious styles of behaviour, and all power and rank. This makes them attractively rebellious, but never a political menace; they are a counter-culture rather than an oppositional one, regarding the very



effort to organise in resistance to the dominant culture as a capitulation to its modes and styles. Joining them is a way for Orlando (and the novel) to avoid taking an attitude to the Turkish revolutionaries.

Orlando's new viewpoint accords with the feminist stance that the author assumes elsewhere. Even while Orlando himself was a committed politician, the biographer's attitude was from the start oblique and satiric, and thus very similar to that adopted by the persona of A Room of One's Own, who experiences that 'sudden splitting off of consciousness' (93) that reduces her from cultural inheritor to outsider. The distance which both biographer and Orlando maintain towards bureaucratic mandarinism results from an 'alien and critical' consciousness as either woman or gypsy. Orlando formulates her new attitudes through her gypsy life, not yet strongly conscious of her womanhood, of its future restrictions and deprivation. Yet gradually this view will be connected with her femaleness, for she will come to realize that though 'the man looks the world full in the face, as if it were made for his uses and fashioned to his liking', 'the woman takes a sidelong glance at it, full of subtlety, even of suspicion' (171). On board the ship to England, Orlando realizes that by becoming a woman she is now deprived of power, profession and political role: 'All I can do, once I set foot on English soil, is to pour out tea and ask my lords how they like it. D'you take sugar? D'you take cream?' (144). As her speculation proceeds and as new experience inducts her into the female role, Orlando's initial resentment of this deprivation turns into contentment. She thanks Heaven that she is not 'prancing down Whitehall on a war-horse, nor even sentencing a man to death' (146). Like all other Woolfian female heroines, Orlando happily gives up politics for a spiritually richer inner life.

'Better is it', she thought, 'to be clothed with poverty and ignorance, which are the dark garments of the female sex; better to leave the rule and discipline of the world to others; better be quit of martial ambition, the love of power, and all the other manly desires if so one can more fully enjoy the most exalted raptures known to the human spirit' (146).

Here Orlando starts showing an affinity with Woolf's other female characters. She valorises the timeless over the historical, spirituality over the world of politics. However, she is not identifying spirituality with some innate 'femininity'; she sees clearly that it is forced upon women by men who 'dress up like a Guy Fawkes and parade the streets, so that women may praise you' and 'deny a woman teaching lest she may laugh at you' (144). She decides to use 'the dark garments' of 'poverty and ignorance' in order to 'enjoy the most exalted raptures' 'which are... contemplation, solitude, love' (146). The reader is likely to respond here with an irony Orlando herself does not feel, for 'contemplation, solitude, love' are not the exclusive prerogative of women. In fact, Orlando as man has indulged in all of them. The biographer therefore underlines the danger of accepting the produced definition of one's sex and 'the extreme folly - than which none is more distressing in woman or man either - of being proud of her sex' (146). This kind of valorization of either sex would tend to fix the social construction as innate, naturally given.

This points to a difficulty in Woolf's feminism. Woolf's problem is that she rejects the privatised role of women in her society, but then her notions of any possible public roles are also conditioned by that society. She cannot see any public commitment other than the empty vacuities of the Hugh Whitbreads; she always tends to consider the externals of British politics - its antiquarian pomp and ritual - as the beginning and end of it. Missing the raw exercise of power behind all that, she tends to merely despise rather than hate politics; for her, 'prancing down Whitehall on a war-horse' and 'sentencing a man to death' are to be denounced almost without distinction. Another problem is that



Woolf highly values the qualities (solidarity, sensibility, etc.) fostered within an oppressed sub-culture; so her feelings about liberation are always ambivalent, because she feels (probably rightly) that those precious qualities will be lost in the process. Three Guineas will struggle with, but never finally resolve, this tension in her feminism: a demand for liberation, a desire to preserve difference.

By having a character become a woman at the age of thirty, Woolf can bring a critical adult consciousness to bear on that process of feminization which is usually unselfconsciously undergone by the female child. Fantasy lets her write a Bildungsroman with an already mature protagonist. The incident which best reveals that sex is not a fact existing in nature but a social product occurs as soon as Orlando returns to England. Her sex together with other issues of property and paternity come under legal deliberation. 'Thus it was in a highly ambiguous condition, uncertain whether she was alive or dead, man or woman, Duke or nonentity' (153). While the suit is under litigation, all her estates are put in chancery and her titles in abeyance. Thus 'sex becomes a legal fiction, like paternity and property rights', as DiBattista argues. Terry Eagleton points out: 'the "private" is always a juridically demarcated space, produced by the very public structures it is thought to delimit'.<sup>29</sup> As DiBattista also notes, we can hardly ignore the feminist satire in the equation in the sentence quoted above: 'To be alive is to be a man is to be a titled aristocrat. To be dead is to be a woman is to be a social nonentity'.<sup>30</sup> After some hundred years' deliberation, the lawsuits are settled; Lord Palmerston announces that Orlando's sex is 'indisputably, and beyond the shadow of a doubt...female' (229). This arbitrary proclamation is further undercut both by the fact that two pages earlier Orlando and her lover had cried to each other 'You're a woman, Shel!', 'You're a man, Orlando!' (227), and by the reader's knowledge of Orlando's androgynous life throughout the eighteenth

century. Property rights, paternity and above all sex are revealed as arbitrary, as legal fiction. If the court admits Orlando's womanhood and her complete right to the estates and titles, it is only at the expense of 'her' marriage with Rosina Pepita and its offspring (three sons). Moreover, the judgement does not admit female descendants hereafter. "The estates which are now desequestrated in perpetuity descend and are bailed and entailed upon the heirs male of my body" (229). Thus Orlando's femaleness is provisionally accepted only to eliminate a worse social threat to property (gypsy origins), and womanhood is anyway finally expelled from the pedigree to secure patriarchal property rights.

Having lived for some time as a woman in a society which is structured by the division of sexes, Orlando cannot help being formed into a 'woman' along the lines of this division. The biographer's confident declaration that the change of sex in Constantinople had not altered Orlando's identity must now be qualified: 'what was said a short time ago about there being no change in Orlando the man and Orlando the woman, was ceasing to be altogether true' (170). 'More modest, as women are, of her brains', 'more vain, as women are, of her person' (170), Orlando the woman, though in a sense remaining 'one and the same person' as Orlando the man, now prompts the biographer to remark that 'a certain change was visible...even in her face' (171). And to speculate on the cause and effect of these changes, one 'philosophical' theory the biographer introduces is that 'clothes change our view of the world and the world's view of us' (170). 'Vain trifles' clothes may be, yet they constitute a code in society, are part of our system of signs, and the effect of having skirts around her legs had already been shown to have an impact in the development of Orlando's new womanhood. Reversing the presumed relationship of priority between men and women and their signifying systems in good structuralist fashion, the narrator speculates that 'it is clothes that wear us and not we them' (170). However, the biographer offers another theory to which she says 'on the whole, we



incline' (171). 'The difference between the sexes is, happily, one of great profundity. Clothes are but a symbol of something hid deep beneath.' This could be read as meaning that clothes are only a superficial social code, which symbolizes some deeper, more important, structural coding of society, and would thus be consistent with the previous position. But the biographer continues: 'It was a change in Orlando herself that dictated her choice of a woman's dress and of a woman's sex.' The previous case now seems reversed, as some feminine 'essence' is given priority over female social existence, yet if we take the 'change in Orlando herself' to be her physical change of sex, the sentence becomes circular, its first and last phrases coinciding with each other. It is then the word and fact of 'change' itself that loses its obviousness, as the text elaborates: 'And perhaps in this she was only expressing rather more openly than usual...something that happens to most people without being thus plainly expressed' (171). Again the sentence becomes circular: in 'this' (a change) Orlando expresses 'something that happens' (change). The nature of the 'change' is never specified nor clarified; it is just 'something that happens to most people'. This shows the limit of Woolf's concept of androgyny, but in a sense she is necessarily obscure on this point; for if, as I will argue below, Woolf believes the difference between the sexes cannot be defined in terms of biological or immanent essences, then 'change' from one sex to the other cannot be specified either.

Orlando enacts 'a vacillation from one sex to the other' (171) and changes her behaviour and clothes according to the changes in her; this is not a once-for-all 'change' to a fixed essence of femininity or masculinity. 'Different though the sexes are, they intermix' (171). We face what the biographer terms 'a dilemma' (171): the difference between the sexes does not simply coincide with biological gender-difference; for 'often it is only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness,

while underneath the sex is the very opposite of what it is above' (171-2). Thus she negates the previous essentialist argument on clothes and sexual difference. But intermixture does not mean fusion into homogeneous unity, for the difference between the sexes remains 'one of great profundity'. Yet this difference in turn cannot any longer be confounded with biological determination. Profound yet intermixing, such 'difference' becomes as difficult a term as 'change' itself. As I noted in my first chapter, Woolf often emphasises sexual 'difference' in her essays, at the same time carefully avoiding any essentialist definition of it. Difference between the sexes exists only in relation to each other and the representation of it. It is a matter of where the dividing line is, and the location of that line varies historically. Any definition only has meaning in relation to a specific socio-historical context, since there is no innate bond between signifier and signified. Woolfian androgyny is analogous to Saussure's definition of language; just as language is a system of differences without 'positive' terms, so is gender a system of differences without any immanent essences. Thus androgyny opens up new possibilities in the fixed division of gender. 'She was man; she was woman...It was a most bewildering and whirligig state of mind to be in' (145). This 'whirligig' should be seen as Woolf's attempt to solve a dilemma for feminism which, as I noted above, Julia Kristeva has most sharply posed: how to achieve the 'masculine, paternal' identification which supports time and symbol, in order to have one's voice heard in politics and history, but simultaneously to preserve and assert one's otherness, to summon 'this timeless "truth" - formless, neither true nor false, echo of our jouissance, of our madness, of our pregnancies - into the order of speech and social symbolism'.<sup>31</sup> We may see Orlando as attempting to realize precisely the 'impossible dialectic' that Kristeva evokes: 'a constant alternation between time and its "truth", identity and its loss...never the one without the other'. For this sexual oscillation is not, according to the novel, merely Orlando's



unique situation: 'In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place' (171). 'Of the complications and confusions which thus result everyone has had experience' (172). The biographer generalizes this phenomenon of heterogeneity; Orlando is just more honest and open than most people to 'this mixture in her of man and woman, one being uppermost and then the other' (172). Changing 'frequently from one set of clothes to another' (199) and living both sexes, Orlando 'reaped a twofold harvest', 'the pleasures of life were increased and its experiences multiplied' (200). Reading 'in a China robe of ambiguous gender'(200), engaged in the economic management of the estate, receiving proposals of marriage from a nobleman at Richmond, fighting duels and serving as a naval captain, Orlando alternates between time and truth, history and the timeless, at once an active participant in society and the muted object of male desire. S/he slides from woman to man, from man to woman, as easily as she changes from one set of clothes to another, metamorphosing in a permanent flux and instability. The author does not present androgyny as a Hegelian synthesis of man and woman; Orlando lives alternation not resolution.

In a sense, this points to the limits of our thinking within patriarchal societies in which sexual differences are so implacably structured that they do not even allow a utopian imagination of a new sexuality. However much 'whirligig' and 'vacillation' Orlando experiences, sexual differences persist almost stereotypically. Orlando's 'manliness' involves nonchalance about clothes, impatience with household matters, bold and reckless activity ('games of hazard' and driving 'six horses at a gallop over London Bridge' (172)), and Orlando's womanly disposition entails a lack of male formality and desire for power, her excessive tender-heartedness, her 'tears on slight provocation', her weakness in geography and mathematics (172). Androgyny itself is 'non-conceptual' and unrealistic, but its components are presented in terms of

naturalistic stereotypes. The unnaturalistic element (the fantastic) arises only from the continual shifting between these naturalistic components, in a way characteristic of fantastic narrative. The fantastic is not simply irrational: 'it exists in a parasitical or symbiotic relation to the real'.<sup>32</sup> For in order to put the category of 'the real' into question, the fantastic needs, at least initially, realistic forms. Through such forms it speaks all that is not said, all that is 'unsayable, in the positivist, realist narrative. The fantastic exists in the shifting of the 'real' and the 'imaginary'; it is the systematic inscription of 'hesitation'<sup>33</sup> between them. No metaphor can condense into a single, fused image this heterogeneity, this constant transgression of sexual boundaries; it can only be presented in metonymical displacement. Woolf's choice of the genre of the fantastic for this novel of androgyny was a right and necessary one. For, as R. Jackson argues, 'the fantastic is not metaphorical. It does not create images which are "poetic", rather it produces a sliding of one form into another, in a metonymical displacement'.<sup>34</sup> Woolf writes in her diary that in Orlando she achieved 'externality' (WD, 118) rather than depth, atypically valorising metonymy over metaphor.

The representation of androgyny as continual displacement of the boundary between the sexes naturally broaches the theme of 'disguise', with which the text is indeed obsessed from the start. Orlando is proclaimed 'he' in the first sentence of the book, but it is simultaneously reported that 'the fashion of the time did something to disguise it'(15). In view of this paradoxically unsettling sentence, Orlando's later sex-change and the housekeeper's long-standing suspicion of his sex, his ambiguous clothes here may be seen as an index of Orlando's 'true' sex; Orlando may well be woman disguised as a boy. As the biographer reflects later, it is only the clothes that define as male or female the individual person in whom, in fact, a vacillation from one sex to the other constantly takes place. Clothes thus attempt to 'fix' an



aberrant sexuality just as Palmerston's legal decision does later. The text often introduces ambiguous clothes which shake people's automatic identification of the sex by the accepted sartorial codes. Sasha first appears to Orlando with her sex disguised and ambivalent: 'whether boy's or woman's, for the loose tunic and trousers of the Russian fashion served to disguise the sex' (36). This incidental concealment of sex becomes a more conscious manipulation of disguise in the Archduke Harry's case. He reveals himself as a man, leaving 'a heap of clothes...in the fender' (162) when Orlando turns round to offer a glass of wine. Orlando often disguises herself as a man, or, more strictly speaking, just dresses herself more honestly, according to turns of her disposition. On the first night of her adventures Orlando 'flung off all disguise and admitted herself a woman' (197) in the room of a street woman. 'Disguise' is a play with the boundary between seeming and being, blurring any sharp distinction between the two and opening up a space of heterogeneity within unitary being. This recurrent theme of disguise is only another enactment of the impossible concept of androgyny, a literal realization of the heterogeneity of sexuality by metonymical movement, though now on a naturalist level. In the end 'disguise' is no longer even necessary; even without it, Orlando recognizes a woman in Shel, Shel a man in Orlando. They realize and recognize their own and each other's androgyny, rejecting that apparent unitariness of sex which is only held in place by clothes as signifying systems.

Orlando's search for 'male' nocturnal adventure reflects partly her fidelity to her own turn of sexual disposition, but also her dissatisfaction with the male friendship and love she has experienced as a woman, whether with the Archduke Harry, 'London society' or with the literary wits. She fails to find the 'life and lover' which she had come to London in search of (173) as long as she is a woman, a mere 'beautiful, romantic animal' (190) or 'only a child of a larger growth'

(193). Subtly or just bluntly excluded from society except as a commodity for exchange or a tea-serving machine, in bitter fulfilment of her earlier prediction (144), Orlando has debased herself into a dumb listener and mediator to the wits. 'So Orlando poured out tea for them all' (191); 'What a life this is!' (192) she exclaims in final disillusionment.

On one of her nocturnal escapades Orlando experiences a 'foolish reverie' which offers an image of the novel's own processes. On a fine April night 'everything appeared in its tenderest form, yet, just as it seemed on the point of dissolution, some drop of silver sharpened it to animation. Thus it was that talk should be, thought Orlando...that society should be, that friendship should be, that love should be' (195). This 'symbol of what is unattainable' has something of the character of an image of ideal androgyny, a syncopation of contradictory impulses of tenderness and sharpness, of entropy and animation. The vacillation between these opposite states of energy is found in Orlando quite apart from his sexual vacillation. S/he was once described as being tossed 'in violent see-saws from life to death', between happiness and melancholy (44). S/he had also recognized her/his image in the mirror as being, contradictorily, 'so dark, so bright, so hard, so soft' (169). This might also be regarded as a self-reflexive account of the novel's own ideal writing, and closely parallels an earlier moment of self-description in Mrs. Dalloway.

Rambling through the night disguised as a man, Orlando strikes up a friendship with the street women. As when s/he had slipped out of the silken rope of the Royal enclosure into the crowd of common people with Sasha, or when as Ambassador at the Court of the Sultan he had slipped out at night in disguise to mingle with the crowd, so Orlando adds another to her/his series of social transgressions. If Orlando were in the usual sense a man, a relationship with a street woman would not be transgressive at all, but rather an accepted act of sexual exploitation



within the limits of the social system. Socially functional though they are, the prostitutes (and their unwanted offspring) are excluded from the main stream of society into its margin. Thus Orlando's three sons by the Spanish dancer are pronounced illegitimate and excluded from society too (229). From one viewpoint, Orlando's friendship with these outcast women is a socially transgressive act, yet since many of them are illegitimate daughters of earls (or even the King), they are, in another, bitterly ironical sense, her equals. Orlando is elected by these women as a member of the 'society of their own' (198), a phrase which glances back to the short story 'Society' and which points a parallel with A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas, which advocates 'the Society of Outsiders'. In the former, which is addressed to middle-class women, Woolf will contend that 'a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction' (RO, 6), but the prostitute needs a room of her own just as much as the woman writer. 'Intellectual freedom depends upon material things' and 'Poetry depends upon intellectual freedom' (RO, 162-3). The other difficulty a woman has to face if she is to write fiction is the lack of tradition behind her: 'For masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice' (RO, 98). This lack of community holds good not only in a diachronic sense but synchronically too. Women have been represented in fiction only from the man's point of view, as the other and as the object of his desire. Women 'are shown in their relation to men' (RO, 124), never allowed to exist in their own right or in their relation to other women. This one-sided picture is both cause and effect of the actual state of women in society. The lack of material conditions deprives women of the mental freedom necessary for forming their own community, and at the same time the absence of women's relationships with each other in the realm of representation undermines

their belief in their practical relationships with other women. Women have thus been separated from each other and cannot develop their own community.

In terms of income and the crucial 'room of one's own' Orlando is utterly privileged. She is enormously wealthy with a mansion of '365 bedrooms' (O, 135), though it is true that all her estates have been put in chancery and her titles are in abeyance while the suits are under litigation. As for the street women, they, too, own their own space simply because they are excluded from the 'main' society and have to support themselves in its margin. The prostitutes differ only in degree, not kind, from the other women in society; their exclusion exposes the blatant truth of that 'marginalisation' to which every woman is in fact subjected. Woolf attempts to fill the gap in the representation of women through the utopian imagining of friendship and community between Orlando as duchess and the street women. The ground of this bond is that both aristocrat and whores are free from the middle-class values of thrift, prudence, economic exchange. The narrative voice in A Room of One's Own tries to recall any occasion in her reading where two women are represented as friends, and realizes that there is none. Mary Carmichael's imaginary sentence - 'Chloe liked Olivia' (RO, 123) - has never yet been written. The scene in which two young women, 'engaged in mincing liver' (RO, 125), liked each other 'has never been seen since the world began' (RO, 127); nor have female words and gestures 'when women are alone, unlit by the capricious and coloured light of the other sex' (RO, 127).

Woolf tries to give expression not only to friendship but also to love between women. Even after Orlando has become a woman herself, it remains women that she loves, 'through the culpable laggardry of the human frame to adapt itself to convention' (147). Thus the text to a degree 'exculpates' the shocking issue of lesbianism by the fantastic device of Orlando's sex-change. After this cunning naturalization, the



author asserts that Orlando's former love for Sasha has neither changed or diminished; on the contrary 'if the consciousness of being of the same sex had any effect at all, it was to quicken and deepen those feelings which she had had as a man' (147). The author claims that Orlando's love for Sasha, now without the gulf which divides the sexes, is purer and truer: 'this affection gained in beauty what it lost in falsity' (147); 'At last, she cried, she knew Sasha as she was' (147). It is obviously Utopian love, but the text offers this Utopia to protest men's belief "'that women are incapable of any feeling of affection for their own sex and hold each other in the greatest aversion'" (199). Woman's existence has not been recognized in its entirety, in its particularity and as difference; as A Room of One's Own argues, in literature women are 'shown in their relation to men' (RO, 124). Therefore without men, women do not exist. Hence, in Orlando, Mr. S.W.'s arrogant belief "'that when they lack the stimulus of the other sex, women can find nothing to say to each other. When they are alone, they do not talk, they scratch'" (199). Orlando's earlier conversational difficulties with the Archduke sufficiently ridicule the banalities to which women are reduced by men. To defy male arrogance, the text shows Orlando and Nell in a state of extreme merriment and ease (197-8), and the biographer dismisses the male beliefs by simply proclaiming that 'Orlando professed great enjoyment in the society of her own sex' (199).

Yet women's desire cannot get into the order of representation. Women are 'always careful to see that the doors are shut and that not a word of it gets into print' (198). So too Freud had asked 'What does a woman want?',<sup>35</sup> and Lacan complains that 'ever since the time we've been begging them, begging them on bended knee to try to tell us about it [jouissance], well, not a word! We've never managed to get anything out of them'.<sup>36</sup> Women cannot articulate what their desire is, for the symbolic order is constituted by, precisely, the repression of woman's

desire and pleasure. The very question, 'what does a woman want?', denies the existence of woman's desire. Orlando elaborates: 'All they desire, we were about to say when the gentleman took the very words out of our mouths. Women have no desires, says this gentleman, coming into Nell's parlour' (198-9). The repression of all that women are identified with - the unconscious, dreams, the body, psychosis, desire, the Imaginary - constitutes the symbolic order as it is, and in this sense woman can be said not to exist.<sup>36</sup> Already in 1919 Virginia Woolf showed her insight into this problem in an essay on George Eliot. Discussing Eliot's heroines, Woolf's penetrating analysis reaches far into the predicament which women face: 'The ancient consciousness of woman, charged with suffering and sensibility, and for so many ages dumb, seems in them to have brimmed and overflowed and uttered a demand for something - they scarcely know what - for something that is perhaps incompatible with the facts of human existence' (CE, I: 204). Inevitably, therefore, when Orlando, Nell and other women try to speak of what they desire, their words are snatched away by the man, repressed and denied.

Yet the repressed always returns. The biographer shows as much embarrassment as she did at the moment of the sex-change in confronting Orlando's desire and its fulfilment, which at last however cannot be denied. Wishing that, as on the former occasion, 'Purity, Chastity, and Modesty' would appear and give her time 'to wrap up what now has to be told delicately', the biographer wishes 'to mitigate, to veil, to cover, to conceal, to shroud this undeniable event' (263). Seeking to articulate 'natural desire' and its 'fulfilment' 'delicately as a biographer should' - that is, to represent desire and jouissance in the symbolic order - the biographer resorts to the intervention of the sound and music of the barrel-organs: 'allow it, with all its gasps and groans, to fill this page with sound' (263). In Kristevan terms, semiotic elements (sound, rhythm, melody) disrupt the symbolic (the written page). For Kristeva writes, the 'semiotization of the symbolic...represents the



flow of *jouissance* into language'.<sup>37</sup>

Orlando herself has been trying to ignore 'desire' and the undeniable consequence of its 'fulfilment' (*jouissance*), that is, her pregnancy, to the last moment. For this is the Victorian period; it is the age of damp, an age of 'the undistinguished fecundity' (208). The same fertility is seen in 'the bed room'; the life of the average woman was a succession of childbirths. 'Thus the British Empire came into existence' (207). 'The damp struck within. Men felt the chill in their hearts; the damp in their minds' (207). The very attempt to rouse feelings into warmth by language becomes a kind of subterfuge: 'Love, birth, and death were all swaddled in a variety of fine phrases. The sexes drew further and further apart...Evasions and concealments were sedulously practised on both sides' (207). The British Empire is constructed under male domination, denying woman's desire, *jouissance*. Women's minds are now channelled by this society solely for 'modesty and shame' (213). The crinoline symbolizes the age; it is 'heavy' and 'drab', and 'impeded' woman's movements (220):

wearing crinolines the better to conceal the fact; the great fact; the only fact; but, nevertheless, the deplorable fact; which every modest woman did her best to deny until denial was impossible; the fact that she was about to bear a child? to bear fifteen or twenty children indeed, so that most of a modest woman's life was spent, after all, in denying what, on one day at least of every year, was made obvious. (212)

The music of the barrel-organ rescues the biographer from the linear narrative progression which her biographical responsibilities impose on her. She lets herself be carried away by the music on 'the most clumsy, the most erratic', 'little boat' of 'thought' (263). Freed from formality, the text becomes increasingly intimate in tone ('Do you recognise...? Oh yes, it is Kew! So here then we are at Kew, and I will show you today...' (263)), and whimsical ('what is this place?...Well, Kew will do' (263)). The writing glides with free and irrelevant 'hops

and skips' (264) in enjoyment of its 'holiday' or 'escapade', just as Orlando was meant for a 'holiday' or 'escapade' by Woolf herself. Since any content will suffice - 'Well, Kew will do' - language does not exist here purely for the sake of the signified. The sentence is formed and urged on by rhyme ('flinging a cloak under...an oak' (264)), and the biographer modulates into a more characteristic Woolfian style. The narrator does not conceal the privilege of the semiotic - 'as the rhyme requires' (264) - indeed she rather emphasizes her playful nonchalance concerning the signified. 'Wait! Wait! The kingfisher comes; the kingfisher comes not' (264), and it hardly matters which. The linear passage of time is also loosened; the mind is freed from that irrevocable successivity of present moments which Clarissa Dalloway had experienced while hearing Big Ben striking the hour and which Orlando suffers as the oppression of the present. Now present and past mingle: to walk through the flowers in Kew Gardens is 'to be thinking of bulbs, hairy and red, thrust into the earth in October; flowering now' (264). Generative, erotic images emerge in this narrative before 'denial [is] impossible; the fact that she was about to bear a child' (212). This respite is in fact less a means of evasion than the only way to approach desire and jouissance. To walk in Kew Gardens is 'to be dreaming of more than can rightly be said' (264), for those semiotic 'dreams' beyond representation embrace all that is outside the symbolic order.

Freed from 'thetic' control, the mind brims over: 'it slops like this all over the saucer' (264), it takes 'silly hops and skips' (264) in 'the most erratic' (263) way. It also recalls a blazing 'fire in a field against minarets near Constantinople' (264). Whether this is the biographer's memory, or the author's, or Orlando's remains indeterminate. The actual scenery, dreams, the past and present, memory, intermingle to the point where it no longer matters whose dreams or memories they are. 'Hail natural desire! Hail happiness!' (264): desire and jouissance now clearly challenge the symbolic order, and threaten the dominance of the



symbolic chain, of what Kristeva terms 'the well-oiled order of communication (and, thus, society)'.<sup>38</sup>

Hail!...pleasure of all sorts...and anything, anything that interrupts and confounds the tapping of typewriters and filing of letters and forging of links and chains, binding the Empire together...Hail, happiness! kingfisher flashing from bank to bank, and all fulfilment of natural desire, whether it is what the male novelist says it is; or prayer; or denial; hail! in whatever form it comes, and may there be more forms, and stranger. (264-5)

The kingfisher flashes from bank to bank 'like a match struck'; he 'flys' and 'burns' (265), as 'the splendid fulfilment of natural desire' (264) flares up. With something of the erratic, pulsing rhythms of the semiotic itself, 'he darts of a sudden from bank to bank' (265) of the stream. Though the narrative consciousness wishes that this stream would flow 'as the rhyme hints "like a dream"' (265), the rhyme gets lost in the utilitarian 'binding together' of society, as the materiality of sound is subdued to the ideality of meaning. The stream the kingfisher flashes across becomes the stream of our own life. Though desire and its fulfilment could be more multiform and stranger than 'the male novelist says it is', 'our usual lot' cannot sustain the 'dream'. 'Alive, smug, fluent, habitual', we sustain 'the Empire', repressing the unconscious and its dreamwork. After this brief efflorescence of desire and pleasure, the symbolic order again rivets down this moment of rupture and thus the stream of society flows steadily on, just as the Thames resumes its quotidian flow after its carnivalistic interruption in the Great Frost. The shade of the trees 'drowns the blue of the wing of the vanishing bird when he darts of a sudden from bank to bank' (265). As the terrain of the unconscious, dreams expose the self as fissured;<sup>39</sup> immersion in dreams threatens the ego established by identification with the mirror image: 'Hail, happiness, then, and after happiness, hail not those dreams which bloat the sharp image as spotted mirrors do the face in a country-inn parlour; dreams which splinter the whole and tear us

asunder and wound us and split us apart in the night when we would sleep' (265). But the eruption of desire now threatens the 'forging of links and chains' of the symbolic, and has to be checked. For Freud, drives are fundamentally dual, positive and negative, 'charges' and 'stases'; their process is, he posits, governed by the death instinct.<sup>40</sup> Orlando, too, evokes a homeostatic state in the grip of the death instinct: 'folded, shrouded, like a mummy...prone let us lie on the sand at the bottom of sleep' (265). But again the pulsations of desire break the stasis: 'blue, like a match struck', the kingfisher 'flies, burns, bursts the seal of sleep', 'so that now flows back refluxent like a tide, the red, thick stream of life again; bubbling, dripping' (265). Such oscillations mark out precisely the place of Kristeva's chora, which is 'no more than the place...where [the subject's] unity succumbs before the process of charges and stases that produce him'.<sup>41</sup> But the constraints of social structures check the drives, create momentary arrests and stases; the marks of these stases in the drives are thus integrated into the symbolic order, and the semiotic can be seen to shape the symbolic as an 'underlying causality'.<sup>42</sup> Or, in Orlando's version of this process: 'and we rise, and our eyes (for how handy a rhyme is to pass us safe over the awkward transition from death to life) fall on...' (265-6).

Here the music abruptly stops and this semiotic interlude ends as 'our eyes...fall on' Orlando's first-born child, the only childbirth in all Virginia Woolf's novels. Kristeva argues that a child is the 'sole evidence, for the symbolic order, of jouissance and pregnancy; the child, thanks to whom the woman, herself an instrument localized in time, will be coded into the chain of generations'.<sup>43</sup>

The spirit of the nineteenth century is 'antipathetic to her in the extreme, and thus it [takes] her and [breaks] her'; she becomes 'aware of her defeat' (220). Caught up by her author's own hostility to the Victorian age, Orlando's career here reaches its nadir. This is, no



doubt, the age which is most antagonistic to the ideal of androgyny. Contrasted to the orderly and serene eighteenth century, the nineteenth century is presented as an odious age of sentimentality, domesticity and rigid convention. Though the American Marxist critic Fred~~e~~ric Jameson occasionally uses Orlando as the image of an unchanging, transcendent personality passing through the centuries,<sup>44</sup> historical and social factors are in fact fully admitted as constitutive for the human subject in the novel. Such continuity as Orlando does maintain through the centuries is solely bolstered by Orlando's country house ('The house, the garden are precisely as they were (214)), and is thus not a matter of a personal 'essence' at all. The Victorian age, despite Orlando's hostility to it, necessarily reshapes her as a product of the age. The determination of consciousness by the social infrastructure is also a matter of the determination of the individual by his or her signifying systems. Orlando proves unable to master her own writing. The moment she gathers together her reflections on 'the eternity of all things', she is interrupted by her servants, 'as if to rebuke it', and then prevented by 'a blot' made by her pen and ink. Subsequently, the pen takes matters into its own hands 'to her astonishment and alarm', and produces 'the most insipid verse she had ever read in her life' (215). The spirit of the age steadily erodes the variety of her past androgynous experiences until she becomes 'the very image of appealing womanhood': 'Her words formed themselves, her hands clasped themselves, involuntarily, just as her pen had written of its own accord. It was not Orlando who spoke, but the spirit of the age' (222). Thus the text confirms its earlier structuralist speculation that 'it is clothes that wear us' (170) rather than we who wear them.

The only freedom left to Orlando is to erase her own involuntary production by spilling her ink over it, a gesture whose pure negativity implies that any 'positive' action is irredeemably penetrated through and through by the age's meanings and values. Even an 'innocent' doodle turns

alien: 'round-headed monster, something between a bat and a wombat' (214). Author and protagonist both concede the latter's 'defeat' in her struggle with an age in which there seem no longer even to be sources of solidarity in alternative or oppositional cultures. There are in the novel no Victorian equivalents of the Turkish gypsies and the eighteenth century prostitutes. It is impossible for a woman to be independent in an age when 'everyone is mated' and 'the new discovery' prevails: 'each man and each woman has another allotted to it for life, whom it supports, by whom it is supported, till death them do part' (221). Deprived of the freedom that is the necessary condition for her literary production through the preceding centuries, Orlando reaches the nadir of her career. She walks on the moor, collecting 'steel-blue plume[s]' of wild birds, as the rooks wheel above her; she is driven to the very margins of society. A single feather falls into the middle of a silver pool, 'mysterious as the lake into which Sir Bedivere flung the sword of Arthur' (223), and we are here reminded of Lily Briscoe's wish that some hand would part the waters of the lake so that the meaning of life would be revealed.<sup>45</sup> Overcome by 'some strange ecstasy' and 'some wild notion', Orlando decides to follow the perhaps symbolic birds to the rim of the world, fling herself on the turf and there drink 'forgetfulness'. She is now almost the point of stepping completely out of society and history into timelessness. 'She quickened her pace; she ran; she tripped....Her ankle was broken' (223). Crippled, she lies content on the ground. For, as I argued in the previous chapter, lameness is a sign of nearness to nature, of intimate connection with the earth, and Orlando accordingly finds her 'mate' in the moor: 'I am nature's bride' (223). She reveals herself as a being who cannot be completely circumscribed within the 'social', as still in touch with a 'nature' that cannot be controlled by civilization. Orlando's temporary lameness is, on one hand, the sign of her fleeing from patriarchal control, but on the other hand, it also prevents her



from fully escaping it. The crinoline which impedes her free movements is not enough after all; she has to be more thoroughly deprived of free movements, so that she can neither run nor 'rise' but will simply 'lie content', and so that finally she will be physically rescued by a man. Breaking her ankle is therefore in a sense the 'death' of the woman as independent being. For when Shelmerdine, the romance prince, appears to save Orlando, crying 'Madam...you're hurt!', she replies 'I'm dead, sir!' (225). At the very moment Orlando seems to give up any prospect of happiness in the social order and concludes that 'death is better', she is rescued -- 'she had broken her ankle, fallen in love, married Shelmerdine' (237) -- and given a legitimate place in Victorian society.

Thus the function of Orlando's marriage with Shelmerdine is to accommodate her to the 'spirit of her age', at least on the surface, and to let her 'pass its examination successfully' (239). The novel must let the marriage temper Orlando to Victorianism, while at the same time distinguishing it from the loveless nineteenth century couplings the book had denigrated earlier. Thus Orlando likes her husband (which is perhaps not unrelated to the fact that he's always away!), maintains friendships outside marriage, still preserves her creative desires. For in a sense the purpose of this marriage is to enable Orlando to write her poem: 'the transaction between a writer and the spirit of the age is one of infinite delicacy, and upon a nice arrangement between the two the whole fortune of his works depends' (239-40). What Woolf regards as the optimally 'happy position' is that in which one need neither fight one's age nor submit to it, and Orlando now achieves this precarious balance: 'Now, therefore, she could write, and write she did' (240). In her essays too, Woolf is no less adamant that conflict with the spirit of the age can produce only a literary 'monster' (214). 'Consciousness of self, of race, of sex, of civilization', she writes in 'American Fiction', 'have nothing to do with art' (CE, 2:113). This is not, however, to deny the vital impact which sexual, social and racial conditions have on art.

Woolf expressly affirms the power of these determinations on literary production in A Room of One's Own and 'Women and Fiction', and no less so in Orlando by making the intervention of the spirit of age explicit. It is passion such as resentment, unhappiness, anger, whose intensity cannot be objectified into the impersonal forms of art, that 'introduces a distortion and is frequently the cause of weakness' (CE, 2:144). Marriage with Shelmerdine saves Orlando from such a disabling self-consciousness in an age so antipathetic to her temperament that it threatens to provoke in her a bitter resentment.

Orlando's marriage not only saves her from bitter self-consciousness, but also seeks to realize the androgynous ideal in the only form which is permissible for 'the spirit of the age', namely in the form 'marriage'. It is a necessary compromise now that androgyny, realised in the eighteenth century, is repressed by a more rigid conventionality. The author thus presents a Utopian 'androgynous' marriage, which none the less remains one of the less convincing parts of the book, since it is after all a social facade; it is more a device to maintain social appearances than a radical exploration of the issues. "'You're a woman, Shel!" she cried / "You're a man, Orlando!" he cried' (227). Thus 'such a scene of protestation and demonstration', with its interchange of sexes, takes place for the first time 'since the world began'. Transgression from one sex to the other is now performed within matrimony. Behind this social facade, an 'air-pocket' of resistance to the false definitions and division of femaleness and maleness is secured in defiance of the unfavourable social climate.

If the marriage has a Utopian content, sketching out the full possibilities of androgyny, it also has its ideological aspect, since it is in this relationship that Orlando arrives at last at a conviction of 'rare and unexpected delight' in being a woman: "'I am a woman", she thought, "a real woman, at last"' (228). Moreover, it is at this point



that she is legally pronounced a woman. What convinces Orlando of her womanliness is a feeling of maternal protectiveness incited by the odd vision of Shelmèrdine as a 'boy (for he was little more) sucking peppermints' (227) during his passionate struggle against the waves. This almost Ramsayan affection prompts Orlando to declare herself 'a real woman, at last'. Here Woolf seems to be betraying some intractable personal limitation, a kind of feminist 'bad conscience', about what real womanhood is. For Woolf, her mother Julia Stephen<sup>e</sup> and her sister Vanessa are always the model of complete womanliness. Mature, motherly, abundant, protective, practical, they embody precisely those qualities which Woolf feels that she lacks. She describes Vita too as a real woman: 'There is her maturity and full breastedness...her capacity...her motherhood...her being in short (what I have never been) a real woman'.<sup>46</sup> Woolf's difficult sense of her own inadequacies as 'a real woman' have been canvassed in Phyllis Rose's A Woman of Letters.<sup>47</sup>

The first fruit of Orlando's marriage is her completion and publication of her poem 'Oak Tree'. Preceding the birth of her first son, it is presented as the equivalent of child-bearing. Now that the poem is finally gone into the world thanks to the midwifery of Nick Greene, Orlando 'felt a bare place in her breast where she had been used to carry it' (253). Structurally, too, the narrative enacts a parallelism between Orlando's writing of the poem and the bearing of her child; in both cases the biographer is put into a dilemma - out of a job, or overcome with embarrassment - and employs evasion and indirection. Since bearing a child has no effect whatsoever on Orlando's mental life in the text, it is her poem and its publication, to which she is deeply committed, that emerges as the culmination of the marriage.

Though Orlando's giving birth is rather abruptly presented and seems irrelevant in context, the text actually endorses the Kristevan view which I discussed above, namely that a child is the sole evidence of jouissance for the symbolic order. Just four pages before the onset of

labour, the biographer presents Orlando in ecstasy. It is true that her husband is not physically with her (he is away off Cape Horn), but the source of Orlando's ecstasy is Shelmerdine all the same. The ecstasy which suddenly overcomes her, prompted by 'a toy boat on the Serpentine', is presented as completely nullifying the meaning and values which society upholds: usefulness, practicality, logic, in short, the symbolic order itself.

'A toy boat, a toy boat, a toy boat', she repeated, thus enforcing upon herself the fact that it is not...eight-hour bills nor covenants nor factory acts that matter; it's something useless, sudden, violent;...a splash; like those hyacinths (she was passing a fine bed of them); free from taint, dependence, soilure of humanity or care for one's kind; something rash, ridiculous, like my hyacinth, husband I mean, Bonthrop: that's what it is - a toy boat on the Serpentine, ecstasy - it's ecstasy that matters.(258-9)

Risking life itself, ecstasy casts away the 'articles' and 'covenants' of society, and the writing itself enacts the 'sudden', 'ridiculous' 'spirits' and 'splashes' it speaks of. It does not follow a coherent logic. A casual physical circumstance (the hyacinths she just happens to pass) becomes an integral part of the vision: 'She did not care in the least what nonsense it might make, or what dislocation it might inflict on the narrative' (259).

The image of a boy sucking peppermints, courageously confronting danger sustained only by his passion for adventure, prompts a maternal protectiveness, and Orlando thanks Shelmerdine for arousing feminine delight. Yet this image of the boy on the boat or the 'toy boat' then shifts from the loving gentleness of maternal affection to a more violent, subversive jouissance, which threatens to overturn the repressive, paternal order. Orlando's ecstasy on the banks of the Serpentine can be compared to Clarissa Dalloway's experience of intense joy while walking in London. Just as Clarissa prefers roses to Armenians or Albanians, so too Orlando's enthusiasm for the toy boat risks



triviality, yet is more subversive than it may initially seem. It aligns her with Septimus against Bradshaw and his 'sense of proportion', against the symbolic and the 'rational' order of the sign. In Orlando, too, the same polarization is presented. The scholarly protocols of Nick Greene's article had plunged her into the depths of despair; but 'the toy boat had raised her to the heights of joy' (259). The heavy traffic kept Orlando 'standing there, repeating, ecstasy, ecstasy, or a toy boat on the Serpentine, while the wealth and power of England sat...in hat and cloak, in four-in-hand, victoria and barouche landau' (259). Orlando regards these 'portly and splendid' figures, 'the triumph of an age', as some kind of unwieldy 'leviathans', who cannot accommodate 'stress, change and activity', but just sit lethargically finishing 'their time of propagation'. In this sense, Orlando's love for Shelmerdine, who is 'rash', 'ridiculous' and who invariably sails 'uselessly', is already antithetical to the values of Victorian capitalism, which repress the non-utilitarian and non-productive. If this feeling of Orlando were intensified, then we should emerge into Septimus's disgust with humanity. If this vision moves from conventional maternal love to jouissance, then the fact of Orlando's own childbirth tends rather in the opposite direction, from challenge to convention. Though the child constitutes the sole evidence, for the symbolic order, of jouissance and pregnancy, it is also, ironically, the means whereby the woman will be coded into the chain of generations, receiving a place and function in the symbolic order at the cost of jouissance itself.

With the 'shrinkage' which Orlando remarks as King Edward succeeds Victoria, the fantastic aspect of the book also diminishes as a result of the author's loss of detachment towards the object of her writing. The author's identification with Orlando strengthens as the narrative reaches the former's historical present and her own immediate concerns.<sup>48</sup> As John Graham rightly points out:

Along with this reduction of Orlando and her milieu to the proportions of actual life runs a steady transfer of their fabulous aura to the events of the past which she now recalls. Yet these events are carefully robbed of their absurdity.... Fables must become history, for we are intended to take this resurrection of the dead not in the irrelevant spirit with which we took the Great Frost, but in the spirit of a solemn vision.<sup>49</sup>

But the aesthetic strength of the book was not in making history appear vividly before us, but rather in rupturing history itself by the laughter which results from the consciousness of being an outsider, of being a woman excluded from the historical. The success of the early part of Orlando derived from this stance, which Woolf was to adopt again in A Room of One's Own where she looks at the patriarchal institutions 'with pleasurable obliqueness',<sup>50</sup> with a consciousness which 'splits off'. Where the female sense of priorities does not coincide with history (of men), history becomes irrelevant to women. The author makes the biographer deplore the fact that 'when we write of a woman, everything is out of place - culminations and perorations; the accent never falls where it does with a man' (280-1). Woolf herself noted a lack of 'unity' in her diary: 'The truth is I expect I began it as a joke and went on with it seriously. Hence it lacks some unity' (WD, 128). In fact, this deflation of the burlesque and fantastic had begun, as John Graham points out, with the onset of the eighteenth century.<sup>51</sup> From that point the biographer's detachment towards the subject matter, which is the very basis of the whole burlesque mode, gradually diminishes until she completely disappears in the last five pages. Since this 'serious' tone gradually sets in after Orlando has become a woman, it seems that Woolf's feminist concerns ultimately drive her into earnestness. Woolf herself is at last affected by self-consciousness at being a woman, by her resentment and anger, though she had so often deplored this in other women writers.

This diminishing of the fantastic also takes the form of the text's increasing inclination towards metaphor. As I remarked above, the



narrative principle of Orlando is initially metonymy (or contiguity). The concept of androgyny is realized metonymically; and the narrative itself moves fast geographically and temporally. Woolf had herself pointed to this feature of the novel when she spoke of its 'plain sentences', 'the externality' (WD, 118) of never having got down to the depths, never having tried to explore (WD, 136). 'Half laughing, half serious' (WD, 120) as the book's tone has hitherto been, it is none the less towards the end drawn into 'depth' and hunts for metaphor and symbol. Since, as R. Jackson argued, 'the fantastic is not metaphorical' and 'does not create images which are "poetic" [but rather] produces a sliding of one form into another, in a metonymical displacement',<sup>52</sup> Orlando necessarily abandons fantasy and embraces metaphor in the same gesture, thus in the end conforming to the canons of what Woolf considered the 'important', 'serious' side of her literary project. What began as a fantastic joke ends up foreshadowing her next work, The Waves, which is already envisaged as 'something abstract poetic next time...Orlando leading to The Waves (8 July, 1933)' (WD, 128,105).

'Images, metaphors of the most extreme and extravagant twined and twisted in his mind. He called her a melon, a pineapple, an olive tree, an emerald, and a fox in the snow all in the space of three seconds' (36-7). Though the text is permeated with metaphor from the start, it remains very self-conscious about them. The biographer often makes defensive gestures, baring the mechanism of metaphor as 'extreme and extravagant' rather than trying to exploit its power of poetic symbolisation:

Now the Abbey windows were lit up and burnt like a heavenly, many-coloured shield (in Orlando's fancy); now all the west seemed a golden window with troops of angels (in Orlando's fancy again) passing up and down the heavenly stairs perpetually. (51)

if we must compare the landscape to anything, it would have been to a dry bone; to a sheep's skeleton; to a gigantic skull picked white by a thousand vultures. (137)

Orlando himself, as a would-be poet, is deeply concerned with the problem of metaphor, and often annoyed by the discrepancy between the thing itself and language, which operates necessarily according to the principle of metaphor. As a boy, he deplores the fact that 'green in nature is one thing, green in literature another', that 'nature and letters seem to have a natural antipathy' (18). In his passion for Sasha, trying to capture her essence in language, he discovers that she is 'like nothing he had seen or known' at least 'in England', and comes to despair: 'Ransack the language as he might, words failed him. He wanted another landscape, and another tongue' (45). But Orlando will discover that his difficulty is not a contingent matter of the limits of a particular language, but rather a problem of the limits of language as such. In his attempt to define 'What is love? What friendship? What truth?' (92), he is trapped by the circularity and figurality of language. Unable to reach the truth of things, he frustratedly exclaims 'Another metaphor by Jupiter!':

'Why not say simply in so many words...A figure like that is manifestly untruthful,' he argued, '...And if literature is not the Bride and Bedfellow of Truth, what is she? Confound it all,' he cried, 'why say Bedfellow when one's already said Bride? Why not simply say what one means and leave it?' (94)

In denouncing the phrase 'Bride and Bedfellow', Orlando rejects the seductive pleasures of alliteration (semiotic) for the rigours of ideal meaning. Yet sheer literalism fares no better. No doubt 'the grass is green and the sky is blue', but when Orlando looks up he sees that things are totally different: 'the sky is like the veils which a thousand Madonnas have let fall from their hair; and the grass fleets and darkens like a flight of girls fleeing the embraces of hairy satyrs from enchanted woods' (94). Ironically, sensuous particularity can only be approached by metaphor. Thus whether he says bluntly what the thing is or whether he uses sophisticated images and metaphors, Orlando remains embroiled in language, which - metaphorical or literal - has always



already displaced the thing itself (You cannot eat the word 'bread'). Orlando exclaims, 'Both are utterly false' (95). One never escapes metaphor; seeing is always seeing as. As a woman among gypsies in the Turkish mountains, Orlando still 'compared the flowers to enamel and the turf to the Turkey rugs worn thin. Trees were withered hags, and sheep were grey boulders. Everything, in fact, was something else'(131).

Towards the end of the book this self-consciousness or even self-ridicule in relation to metaphor disappears completely. The early excessive use of similes, which bares the principle of metaphor (similarity) openly, changes into an indulgence in 'metaphor' proper. The final resonant metaphor or symbol of 'the wild goose' had already been given its imagistic foundations in the penultimate chapter, with its references to 'A steel-blue plume' of the rooks, 'wild birds' feathers', 'smooth, glinting plumage' (223). Orlando sees 'a single feather' quivering in the air and falling into the middle of 'a silver pool, mysterious as the lake into which Sir Bedivere flung the sword of Arthur' (223). Through this connection with the Arthurian sword, the various images associated with the plumage of birds are related to the possibility of some ultimate truth. In To the Lighthouse Lily Briscoe had expressed her agonized wish for 'the meaning of life' (TL, 249) in a similar image: she wishes that 'a little tear would have rent the surface of the pool', that 'Something would emerge. A hand would be shoved up, a blade would be flashed' (TL, 276). Just as Lily's struggle in painting merges with her quest for this meaning, so too 'the wild goose' is closely implicated with Orlando's concerns as poet; it represents all that she has been trying to body forth in her poetry: 'Always it flies fast out to sea and always I fling after it words like nets...which shrivel...and sometimes there's an inch of silver - six words - in the bottom of the net. But never the great fish who lives in the coral groves' (282). The text here shows a curious intertwining of metaphor and

metonymy; it offers an important symbol, but slides from one form to another; from the 'goose' to the 'fish' in a metonymical displacement with 'sea' as a point of contiguity. A similar interchange between 'sea' and 'sky' occurs again in the final episode where Shelmerdine lands on shore as Orlando looks on. Shelmerdine may have a passion for boats and have 'grown a fine sea captain' (295), but he arrives back by plane and leaps to the ground as if he were captain of that plane. At this very moment 'a single wild bird' springs up over his head: "'The wild goose..." Orlando cries' (295). If previously the wild goose flew out to sea, directions are now reversed; Shelmerdine, whose associations are all with the sea, has flown back from the sea as the wild goose. However, in both cases, this metonymical development is not elaborated, certainly not as a possible spring board for the fantastic. The whole emphasis is now on metaphor or symbol, whatever its physical embodiment may momentarily be, wild goose or fish. Yet, if the tenor of the metaphor is the same even when vehicles are changed, does this not mean its failure as symbol? But since towards the end of the novel the vigilant and ironical biographer has disappeared and the author is much more identified with the heroine, the discrepancies or extravagancies or failures of metaphor do not come to narrative self-consciousness.

The fact that the narrative has reached the present is a major factor in diminishing the scope of the fantastic. Discovering that 'It was 1928...the present moment'; 'Orlando started, pressed her hand to her heart, and turned pale. 'For what more terrifying revelation can there be than that it is the present moment?' (268). Does not this also allude, self-referentially, to the disturbance the biographer/author feels in confronting the present in writing? Roland Barthes writes that narrative is possible only in the past tense;<sup>53</sup> to write a biographical story of the present moment is impossible, a point where writing has to stop. Thus both novelist and protagonist receive with 'a great shock' the announcement of the present hour by the clock: 'the present again struck



her on the head. Eleven times she was violently assaulted' (275). If the present is such a 'disruption', yet still 'we survive the shock', this is 'only possible because the past shelters us on one side and the future on another' (268). For Orlando, the present is always a fearful 'narrow plank' from which she might 'fall into the raging torrent beneath' (269) through an instant's carelessness. This is indeed the characteristic experience of time for Woolf's women. Orlando's chiming clock recalls the menacing strokes of Big Ben in Mrs. Dalloway: 'First a warning...then, the hour irrevocable' (MD, 6). At one level the hours operate in that novel as narrative connecting points, threading various characters' lives together, but at another they are mercilessly 'shredding and slicing, dividing and subdividing' (MD, 113) as they impose an objective order on the lived flux of experience; hence Big Ben tolls oppressively and gloomily ('The leaden circles dissolved in the air' (MD, 6)). Time carries one 'irrevocably' and momentarily nearer to death in its linear progress, as Mrs. Ramsay so sharply senses as she hears the sound of the falling waves with 'an impulse of terror' (TL, 30). For her too, the present is dangerous and slippery; safety resides only in the past 'since it had happened twenty years ago, and life, which shot down even from this dining-room table in cascades, heaven knows where, was sealed up there, and lay, like a lake, placidly between its banks' (TL, 145). Why, then, should all these characters fear the present moment?

And indeed, it cannot be denied that the most successful practitioners of the art of life...somehow contrive to synchronise the sixty or seventy different times which beat simultaneously in every normal human system so that when eleven strikes, all the rest chime in unison, and the present is neither a violent disruption nor completely forgotten in the past. (O, 274)

Since Orlando is obviously not one of 'the most successful practitioners of the art of life', the present is either 'a violent disruption' or 'completely forgotten in the past' (274). The present

moment is not well 'sheltered' by the past and the future on both sides. Neither Orlando nor Clarissa nor Mrs. Ramsay can experience time as necessary development out of the past into the present directed towards a willed future. For them, present and future are discontinuous, with no dialectical relation to each other. The future is as alarming in its unpredictability as the present is disturbing in its intense actuality: 'life, which shot down even from this dining-room table in cascades, heaven knows where' (TL, 145); 'The present fell from her like drops of scalding water' (O, 269). What is lacking is any grasp of history as meaningful process; the past is merely an isolated space in which life is 'sealed up' and lies 'like a lake, placidly between its banks', and into which one plunges now and then, or which engulfs the present. When Orlando sits in Queen Elizabeth's armchair the past revives as a vista: 'It was as a tunnel bored deep into the past' (287). But when the clock strikes four, this vision is completely demolished: 'The gallery and all its occupants fell to powder' (287). Mutually incompatible as they are, when the past appears, the present disappears, and vice versa. Now that the present makes its appearance with almost alarming 'distinctness', the past is completely erased.

Orlando's experience of discontinuity, her lack of any sense of history which would structure time into a meaningful teleology arises from the fact that, as a woman, she is excluded from the temporal order itself - from history, politics, society. When Orlando becomes woman, she initially welcomes this position of outsider set over against 'the rule and discipline of the world'. Against the political order, she asserts the full enjoyment of 'the most exalted raptures', 'contemplation, solitude, love' (146). This is clearer still in the manuscript version of the novel:

surely our choice is better than theirs: poverty, insignificance, nakedness: [those are] the [humble] garments which cover us with invisibility & allow us to escape from all the [ties of pomp] & circumstance: to pass lonely & free as



clouds where we are unnoted; to hover there...unregarded, [peeking], watching; observing, lost in contemplation; to [escape from] the [O] odious ceremonies, disciplines (here they come to slip from mankind) who are as busy with their ceremonies & disciplines; & thus enjoy the most exalted of all states of mind.<sup>54</sup>

Here Woolf more explicitly offers Orlando's alienation from political and social affairs as freedom, as Madeline Moore's note points out.<sup>55</sup> But this escape from 'disciplines' also entails 'insignificance', 'invisibility' and 'loneliness' - namely the silence and marginality to which women are so often consigned. History is made elsewhere by others, without Orlando (woman) having anything to do with it. Since her life has been shaped within patriarchal structures of which she has no grasp, time seems to her to come from an unknowable future and to race into an unknown past. The present is then the precarious 'narrow plank' over 'the raging torrent' (269) between these two unknown elements. For Orlando, history is alien to the living moment of the present: 'It [the house] belonged to time now; to history; was past the touch and control of the living' (286). The present is a place of rapture and terror equally; it is the locus where jouissance may suddenly subvert 'the rule and discipline of the world', but it is also the place where the shocks of both past and future are borne. Hence 'braced and strung up by the present moment', Orlando is also afraid, 'as if whenever the gulf of time gaped and let a second through some unknown danger might come with it' (288).

I have argued that the temporal discontinuity which Orlando experiences is related to her being a woman and thus outside history, but it is clearly also concerned with the difficulties of modern, urban perception. In the capitals of advanced technological capitalist societies many aspects of life depend on processes beyond personal understanding and control. Modern city life is made possible by a separation of people from the sites of production of commodities, and from the requisite scientific processes. Advanced technology and the

immense scale of urban life is beyond the individual's grasp; even the specialist can handle only his own small area. Hence Orlando's amazement: 'The very fabric of life now, she thought as she rose, is magic. In the eighteenth century, we knew how everything was done; but here I rise through the air; I listen to voices in America; I see men flying - but how it's done, I can't even begin to wonder'(270). This sense that one's life is governed by unknown social mechanisms and technology destroys any possibility of wholeness of identity as well as the possibility of totalising history as teleology. The discontinuity of time and fragmentation of the self are clearly connected with each other by the novel: 'For if there are...seventy-six different times all ticking in the mind at once, how many different people are there not - Heaven help us - all having lodgment at one time or another in the human spirit?' (277). Raymond Williams cites Orlando's drive from London to her country house as 'characteristic imagery of the urban preoccupation': 'In Virginia Woolf the discontinuity, the atomism, of the city were aesthetically experienced, as a problem of perception which raised problems of identity'.<sup>56</sup>

Nothing could be seen whole or read from start to finish. What was seen begun...was never seen ended. After twenty minutes the body and mind were like scraps of torn paper tumbling from a sack and, indeed, the process of motoring fast out of London so much resembles the chopping up small of identity which precedes unconsciousness and perhaps death itself that it is an open question in what sense Orlando can be said to have existed at the present moment.(276)

This problem of fragmented identity is, as Williams points out, conventionally resolved on arrival in the country. Just before Orlando's person is 'entirely disassembled', 'one green screen' is held out before her; 'and then green screens were held continuously on either side, so that her mind regained the illusion of holding things within itself' (276). One may draw a psychoanalytical parallel here; as the baby first gains coordination of its motility and then constructs the self as a



unitary whole by identification with its mirror image, so Orlando regains the 'illusion' of a total self by 'the green screens' held out in the Kent countryside.

Orlando seeks 'what some people call the true self' or 'the Key self, which amalgamates and controls' 'all the selves' she has it in her to be (279): 'For she [has] a great variety of selves to call upon', and 'all were different' (278). Evoking the heterogeneous 'selves' possible for Orlando, the biographer demolishes the idea of a single, unitary identity. Orlando herself has to quest for what she is, for who she is (279). Woolf again takes up the theme of the heterogeneity of one's being in the essay 'Street Haunting'. Each human being, she remarks, has 'instincts and desires which are utterly at variance with his main being, so that we are streaked, variegated, all of a mixture':

Is the true self this which stands on the pavement in January, or that which bends over the balcony in June? Am I here, or am I there? Or is the true self neither this nor that, neither here nor there, but something so varied and wandering that it is only when we give the rein to its wishes and let it take its way unimpeded that we are indeed ourselves? Circumstances compel unity; for convenience sake a man must be a whole. (CE, 4:161)

The theme of the impossibility of totalizing all the heterogeneous, incongruous components of the individual was treated in Jacob's Room. That novel was a shuffling of the discontinuous, fragmentary selves of Jacob in the hope that some symbolical fusion would emerge in the end. But what the text could finally offer us was only Jacob's room in London as a frame for sustaining the continuity of Jacob as a person, and even that room itself had to be left empty. In Orlando, the great country house and estate successfully totalizes Orlando's many part-selves. As she passes through the lodge gate and enters the park, Orlando becomes 'what is called, rightly or wrongly, a single self, a real self' (282). The house is origin and continuity - the origin as continuity - it is the only thing that guarantees history for Orlando. Orlando's consciousness

may be radically splintered, but this immense building - its heart still beating - has lived through centuries as a witness of history. Orlando sighs that 'the house was no longer hers entirely...It belonged to time now; to history' (286). She, the living present, cannot be part of time and history, precisely because she is a woman and therefore excluded. Lord Palmerston's judgement declared that the building and the estates descend on 'the heir's male of [her] body' (229). So Orlando will have to abandon the house, because history excludes her. In Jacob's Room, Jacob will never return to his room; history has destroyed him because in Woolf's novels there can be <sup>no</sup> involving, constructive relationship between history and the living individual.

Returning to her origin, the country house, Orlando manages to become 'a single self, a real self' (282), and achieves a certain grasp and mastery of the world: 'Masterfully, swiftly, she drove up the curving drive...' (282). Even at the dangerous moment of the clock's striking the hour, 'she kept, as she had not done when the clock struck ten in London, complete composure (for she was now one and entire, and presented, it may be, a larger surface to the shock of time)' (288). But we should perhaps make note of a certain particularity of Orlando's so-called 'real self', which implies that it is somewhat different from the unitary, fixed self with its monolithically rigid identity. Orlando's self is characterised by certain images of fluidity - 'all is contained as water is contained by the sides of a well' (282), 'as if her mind had become a fluid that flowed round things and enclosed them completely' (283). This mode of perception - gentle envelopment rather than penetration at a single point, using all the senses rather than using just sight - was, as I pointed out above, also the concern of Lily in To the Lighthouse. The scenery observed by the 'fluid' subject in Orlando is also presented in water images: 'the falling turf of the park whose fall was so gentle that had it been water it would have spread the beach



with a smooth green tide' (282-3); 'So she...watched the vast view, varied like an ocean floor' (292).

We now come to a strange episode in this text. Despite her extreme attempt to sustain her unitary 'thetic' self (she 'went firmly' 'with great alertness of movement' (288), walked more 'briskly than she liked' (289)), Orlando encounters an experience which thoroughly subverts this 'positioned' self: 'a raised saucer of pink flesh where the nail should have been' (289) on the carpenter's thumb. Unpleasant this may be, but does it, in naturalistic terms, account for the violence of Orlando's reaction here? I suggest that a psychoanalytical reading is necessary to account for the deeper forces which this sight releases. 'Braced and strung up by the present moment', Orlando desperately tries to maintain hold on the ego that constitutes itself as 'one and entire' (288), as the self which stabilizes the otherwise dispersed and contradictory perspectives of her being, 'the sixty or seventy different times which beat simultaneously (274), the 'many thousand' selves a person may well have (278). This self is maintained by the secure separation of subject and object, inside and outside, and thus positions itself firmly in the world. It can master and know the world only so long as these rigid binary distinctions are held in place; thus the world Orlando sees is now 'miraculously distinct' (288). However, she then sees the 'pink flesh', that vulnerable inside which should have been covered and hidden by a finger nail (the tough carapace of the outside). Her revulsion derives from this sudden, unexpected emergence of the inside. This transgression of the borderline, this confusion of what should have been separated instantly destabilizes the security of the ego and its self-constitutive demarcations of inside and outside. Her ego is overthrown in a fit of disgust which is perhaps related to what Kristeva has called the 'abjection' roused by any ambiguity that confuses identity, system, order, that ignores a border, rules, location.<sup>57</sup> In this state of disgust or 'abjection', with its unstable relations of object and

subject, its unstable 'identity' of other and self, Orlando's ego dissolves, losing its self-possession ('no fingers can hold it' (289)) as unconsciousness threatens and she has a moment of faintness. What is this world that Orlando has been to in this moment of blacking out of consciousness? In that 'moment's darkness' that which had been repressed in the present emerges: 'she was relieved of the pressure of the present. There was something...which...is always absent from the present' (289). 'Terror' and 'beauty' at once, it is 'something one trembles to pin through the body', though it itself 'has not body' (289). In contrast to that 'miraculously distinct', focussed world of the present, which thethetic subject sees, 'the shadow of faintness' reveals a 'pool of the mind' (294), 'at the back of her brain' (290). 'Furthest from sight' (290), there is no clear distinction of subject and object, things are 'misty' (293), nothing is detailed or distinct. There is 'relief', and this is the world of metonymy and metaphor: 'everything was partly something else'; 'things...made the strangest alliances and combinations' (290). This is the terrain with which 'art and religion' are connected (290), a timeless world governed and syncopated by oceanic rhythms: 'Her mind began to toss like the sea' (289). This 'dark pool of the mind', with its shifting and dissolving forms, its labile rhythms, is surely an image of the Kristevan semiotic itself, representing a lapse back from the individuation of the Oedipus into the maternal realm of oceanic indifferentiation.

'She now looked down into this pool or sea in which everything is reflected - ' (290). If art is 'the reflections which we see in the dark hollow at the back of the head when the visible world is obscured for the time' (290) (when the specular ego is in abeyance), then Orlando's poem 'The Oak Tree' is her ultimate achievement in this direction. She climbs the path to the oak tree, which is the eponymous hero of the poem she has been working on for some three centuries, in order to perform 'symbolical



celebrations' (291) and pay homage to the oak tree. But this symbolical intention - to bury the book as tribute - is abandoned, because 'the earth was so shallow over the roots' (291) and anyway she finds it 'silly'. I have argued that towards its end the book precipitates a quest for metaphor and symbol, entailing a rapid abandonment of the fantastic which has operated according to the principle of metonymy. But in this final episode the principle of metonymy 'revolts' and rejects the symbolic gesture. As if the author had become aware that the book has turned serious in spite of her initial intention to have a 'joke', she thwarts an act of burial that would have been a kind of literal enactment of metaphorical depth, a 'reconciliation' of language and Nature. The poem's leaves are ruffled disconsolately by the wind, an appropriately casual and metonymical end to Woolf's venture into the fantastic.

Once again the clock chimes and the present showers down upon Orlando, but now it is night and no longer necessary to faint in order to gaze into 'the dark pool of the mind' (294). The specular ego is now in abeyance; mere 'reflections' have not yet formed into a subject separate from the other or object. This functional world of subject and other is jouissance and death, a collapsing of subject upon object which is simultaneously homeostasis and ecstasy, thus Nirvana. 'She looked into the darkness' (294) in which 'death' and 'ecstasy' blend.

There was her husband's brig, rising to the top of the wave!  
Up, it went, and up and up. The white arch of a thousand  
deaths rose before it...But the brig was through the arch and  
out on the other side; it was safe at last!

'Ecstasy!' she cried, 'ecstasy!' And then the wind sank,  
the waters grew calm;...

'Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine!' she cried, standing by  
the oak tree.

The beautiful, glittering name fell out of the sky like a  
steel-blue feather...He was coming, as he always came, in  
moments of dead calm; when...nothing moved between sky and sea.  
Then he came.(294)

At the stroke of midnight, Shelmerdine makes a 'fantastic' appearance, coming back from sea by aeroplane and leaping to the ground

in front of Orlando. After this final moment of the 'fantastic', the book ends with the symbolic 'wild goose' flying into the night, which I discussed above. Earlier Orlando said: 'Always it flies fast out to sea and always I fling after it words like nets...But never the great fish...' (282). The book ends with a suggestion of her renewed pursuit of 'the wild goose'/'the great fish'. This pursuit will be continued by the author in her next work, The Waves, which is, as she writes in her diary, 'a reach after that vision' of a 'fin in the waste of water' (WD, 158,169).



## CHAPTER VI: THE WAVES

Woolf had been pursuing her own novelistic ideal since she declared war on the Edwardians with 'Modern Novels' in 1919, and on completing The Waves she wrote in her diary: 'What a long toil to reach this beginning - if The Waves is my first work in my own style!'(WD, 176). Yet if The Waves is continuous with her rejection of Edwardian fiction in quest of some inner life or vision, it also marks an attempt to check the 'liquid' mode of writing of To the Lighthouse. Woolf notes that one reviewer had remarked a crisis in her style - 'now so fluent and fluid...like water' - and wonders whether she can 'check' 'that disease' and 'consolidate, more in the Dalloway and Jacob's Room style'(WD, 137). In the diary entries for The Waves she records her desire for a new solidity and depth. She aspired to penetrate deep, vertically, rather than pursue a 'liquid' expansion on the surface,<sup>1</sup> and it is accordingly the very narrative consciousness that had sponsored the 'fluent and fluid' mode of To the Lighthouse that is scrutinized and probed in the later novel.

The style of The Waves is indeed strikingly different from that of Woolf's earlier novels. In Jacob's Room the narrator had made her appearance in a meditation on the difficulties of being a woman ten years older than Jacob, and is thus foregrounded from the start. In Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse the narrator 'disappears', merging with the consciousness of the characters. As I argued in earlier chapters, an extensive use of free indirect speech results in a narrative consciousness of such versatile subjectivity that there is no longer a single subject; narrative discourse hovers suspended between authorial consciousness and characters' minds. In The Waves this 'chameleon style',<sup>2</sup> whereby the third person narrative merges into the first person, is replaced by the device of the dramatic monologue. However, as has often been pointed out, the interior monologues of this novel are very different from that 'stream of consciousness' which such a device is normally used to effect; consciousness does not spill over as it were

unmediatedly on to the page in The Waves. Borrowing a formula from T. S. Eliot, Jean Guign<sup>v</sup>et dubs the monologue in the novel a 'poetic correlate<sup>iv</sup>': 'a way of writing, a style...to obtain an equivalent to the sort of reality she is trying to express'.<sup>3</sup> Hermione Lee equally stresses stylization rather than immediacy: 'a formal, rhythmic monologue subjugates the representation of personality or action to a series of physical images which are made to stand for a state of mind'.<sup>4</sup> The violence of Lee's language - subjugated, made to stand - testifies to liberal humanist assumptions about character that the novel itself rejects, as I shall argue later. Psychoanalysis, too, argues that desire only emerges as such with its 'instinctual representative' or image, which is thus not secondarily yoked to or 'made to stand' for it. None the less, Lee's hostile remark does at least register the formal innovation of the novel. One critic, remarkably, has called The Waves 'the most firmly rooted in stream of consciousness of all her books'; but this could only be said - charitably - to be true in the sense that a narratorial stream of consciousness existed in Woolf's early, inchoate plan of the book, but it disappeared swiftly as she elaborated her idea.

The development of the structure of the book in her diary runs as follows. First it is a 'man and a woman' sitting at a table talking, but then 'she might talk, or think...Perhaps the man could be left absolutely dim'(WD, 108). Yet, still unable to start The Moths (the novel's original title), Woolf has another, clearer idea: 'A mind thinking...In its leaves she might see things happen. But who is she? I am very anxious that she should have no name...I want "she"'(WD, 142-3). A month later, in June: 'Well, all sorts of characters are to be there. Then the person who is at the table can call out anyone of them at any moment; and build up by that person the mood, tell a story'(WD, 144). She asks herself in September: 'Who thinks it? And am I outside the thinker?'(146). As these diary entries suggest, in the first draft of



The Waves there indeed existed an unidentified figure or mind. Initially referred to only as 'the lonely mind'(H, 6, 9), it speaks merely as 'I'. Sexual identity is deliberately blurred: 'by somebody whose sex could not be distinguished in this very early light' (H, 42). 'Some rather vague, apparently very large, yet indefinite figure appeared to be seated at the table...like an old man or woman, thinking alone'(H, 42). Then, as if to make it still more obscure, Woolf 'hoods'(H, 62) that figure or mind; it becomes only 'an eye in the hooded tent' (H, 69). As if in answer to her own earlier question ('Am I outside the thinker?'), the author is indeed situated outside this shadowy mind. Sentences tend to begin: 'if there was a person...'(H, 89), 'suppose there was someone...'(H, 113), 'if there was an eye...'(H, 124). But the eye is effaced as third person description of character gives way to first person monologue. Woolf records this process in the diary: 'The Waves is I think resolving itself (I am at page 100) into a series of dramatic soliloquies'(WD, 159), and this shift seems to take place after page 192 of the holograph.

As the narrative consciousness or meditating mind recedes further from the narrative surface, the characters attain a measure of autonomy. The hitherto detached consciousness interfuses with the speech of the characters, insinuates itself into their very phrases and rhythms. To Woolf it was a sign of achievement that 'I could say what Rhoda said. This proves that the book itself is alive: because it has not crushed the thing I wanted to say, but allowed me to slip it in, without any compression or alteration'(WD, 156). Identification with the characters is in a sense more perfect than in the case of Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse, for the stream of consciousness method maintains and utilises a slight distance between the narrative voice and the discourse of the characters.<sup>6</sup> By expunging the narratorial consciousness from the textual surface, Woolf attempts to realise an ambition first formulated in 1920 as she contemplated what was to become Jacob's Room: '...enclose everything, everything?...enclose the human heart - Am I sufficiently

mistress of my dialogue to net it there?...no scaffolding; scarcely<sup>c</sup> a brick to be seen; all crepuscular, but the heart, the passion, humour, everything as bright as fire in the mist'(WD, 23). Eight years later, planning The Moths, her novelistic goal has not changed: 'what I want now to do is to saturate every atom...to give the moment whole; whatever it includes...It must include nonsense, fact, sordidity: but made transparent'(WD, 139). If we consider Woolf's texts from the early experimental short stories to The Waves in the light of narrative voice, her aim seems to define itself as a quest for the coincidence of the narrative consciousness and 'life' itself, in a manner that would not, however, be that of the omnipotent narrator of the realist novel. Her repeated innovation in forms of narrative consciousness is thus a quest for a more perfect fusion with the minds of the characters. In The Waves, then, it is not the characters' but the narrator's consciousness that is elaborated, the former being only 'poetic correlative' for some wider consciousness that envelops and exceeds them.

The continuities across Woolf's career have been made clearer with the publication of the holograph draft of The Waves, which reveals thematic relationships with such early stories as 'An Unwritten Novel' and 'The Mark on the Wall' that are less apparent in the final text. The original title itself - The Moths - is already a recurrent image in her work, denoting that 'uncircumscribed spirit' that flits briefly towards the light of narrative consciousness only to veer away again before it can be definitively grasped. Also prominent in the opening pages of the draft is that problematic of signs and meaning which I traced above in relation to Jacob's Room and certain short stories. It is necessary to decipher 'a mysterious hieroglyph, always dissolving'(H, 2), which, the text announces, is made by the purple crescent pattern on the lower wings of 'an enormous moth' settled on the wall. In quest of a meaning impeded by the opacity of the signifier, the text has to face the still more



troubling prospect that the signified may be not just postponed but absent from the start: 'some bird pattered out a few irrelevant bars of ~~so-pure-a~~ <sup>so blank</sup> ~~blank~~ sound ~~so-pure~~ that all meaning seemed emptied out of it'(H,2).

This is the purity of kenosis not plenitude, and the rest of the page evokes a world of allegory in the sense I defined in Chapter II. Sign is not fleshed full with meaning; the world, drained of immanent significance, dissolves into unrelated fragments:

so young that it was hardly green; It was all very pale, & discordant too; with <sup>blank music of the</sup> its hieroglyph dissolved; the cock crowing & the melodious birds; the moth<sup>^</sup>; the white plate; the plant; the shells sea turning the shells over, & the <sup>Sight & sound</sup> over again on the beach. They interrupted each other, as if the mind of a very old person, man or woman, had gone back to the dawn of memory; & <sup>without being</sup> had-not-been able to finish any sentence; <sup>without being</sup> had-not-been sure how-things-happened; or what-came-next;-but in what order things came; without attempting to make a coherent story.(H,2)

Though the text here disowns the ambition to make a coherent story, that impulse in fact remains incorrigible. Like the earlier narrator of 'An Unwritten Novel', the text cannot but attempt to centripetally gather the fragments into some satisfying order. 'The power that centralises'(6) collects shreds and shards from the debris, 'attempting to make a whole'(9), 'thinking them into one story, which we one hopes has meaning; or has no meaning'(6). It sets itself the task of discovering 'in the folds of the past' or in 'such fragments as time having broken...the perfect vessel'(H, 6, 9). The last phrase perhaps looks forward to the Grail motif that Percival's name points towards.

If The Waves can at all usefully be called a 'stream of consciousness' novel, it is only by reference to the 'lonely mind', that 'figure brooding at the table'(H, 154), which was expunged from the final version. The operations of this mind in the early pages of the draft recall 'The Mark on the Wall', for they too are a chain of images, associations, speculations, incited by a 'mark' on the wall in a

narrative mind sinking 'deeper and deeper, away from the surface, with its hard separate facts'(HH, 42). Woolf's earlier narrator meditates on the fictional 'image of oneself' created indulgently, stealthily, in solitude: 'we are looking into the mirror...and the novelists in future will realize more and more the importance of these reflections, for of course there is not one reflection but an almost infinite number; those are the depths they will explore, those the phantoms they will pursue, leaving the description of reality more and more out of their stories, taking a knowledge of it for granted'(HH, 43). If we interpret this in the light of Lacan's mirror stage, it would seem that the narrator seeks to fix identity in a single specular image only to find a radical process of splintering and fission begin. Such instability afflicts the object as well as the subject. In this inchoate world, an apparently harmless metaphor, which one had assumed would better render the object in its concrete fullness, shows a dangerous tendency to metamorphose the object. The copula of metaphor - X is Y - assumes an ontological rather than merely rhetorical force. 'In this dim light one thing very easily suggests another. The creases of the table cloth might be waves endlessly sinking and falling'(H, 63); 'how can I be sure that it is a cupboard there; it is a mountain slope'(H, 114). But in so far as Woolf is in quest of a 'feminine' writing that avoids the complementary pitfalls of feminist realism (old form, new content) and schizophrenic modernism (new form, 'no' content), she will have to do justice to both the systematic and the centrifugal impulses. Feminist realism offers a challenge to patriarchy at one level, but only confirms it at another and deeper level (of forms and categories of representation). But an absolute rejection of the symbolic order would only precipitate psychosis and silence. It would so radically divorce itself from the patriarchal system that it would lose all possibility of exerting any effective pressure for change on that system; Finnegan's Wake perhaps suggests the



dangers in this direction. I shall argue that Woolf tries to situate The Waves in the difficult 'between' of these two equally unpalatable options, maintaining a precarious dialectic between identity and its loss, the symbolic and its unrepresentable Other, an unsettling and unsettlable alternation that she had already figured in the sexual metamorphoses of Orlando.

The Waves opens with the dawn sky and seascape. Towards the end of the book Bernard, his self now limitlessly enlarged to 'a whole universe', returns to the same scene (W, 207). Thus the interludes are also images, dreams or reflections which occur inside the narrative consciousness - 'a mind thinking'(WD, 142). The mind looks reflectively at itself, at its own 'shadow' which might hold 'Something? Nothing?'(W,207) and starts to explore its very beginnings.<sup>7</sup> The book inscribes the emergence of self-identity and the process of its development and consolidation. The scenic details are a metaphor for the life process of the characters, and the first interlude presents an undivided state before individuality appears: 'The sea was indistinguishable from the sky....Gradually as the sky whitened a dark line lay on the horizon dividing the sea from the sky'(5). In this prefiguration of the birth of self-consciousness there appears the image of 'veil' or 'fabric' which will recur throughout the book and which is often associated with the mind and being itself. Woolf's image of life as a membrane or veil which contains consciousness or, rather, is consciousness had of course already appeared in her famous definition of life as 'a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end'. A later account of her first memory of life at the dawn of consciousness in 'A Sketch of the Past' reveals the origin of this image: 'the feeling...of lying in a grape and seeing through a film of semi-transparent yellow'(MB, 65).

The last lines of the interlude evoke a still obscure state before the dawn of the self and before the birth of meaning: 'all within was dim

and unsubstantial. The birds sang their blank melody outside'(6). The draft of The Waves offer a more explicit image of the birth of the human subject:

that  
these waves were...many mothers, & again  
of many mothers...endlessly sinking & falling,  
& lying prostrate, each holding up, like  
as the wave <sup>pass</sup> held its crest...a child.(H,9-10)

For every wave, before-it-sunk sank held-up, -& cast a child from it; before it sank into the obscure body of the sea.(H,10)

...innumerable multitudes of little bald naked purplish rolling balls...rolling about on the vast wrinkled white bleached desert....The twisted babies - for such perhaps they were.(H,61)

The little bodies wriggled & turned & twisted, curiously mobile & restless, [--] uneasy, ill-directed, shooting out arms & legs, -- for there could be no doubt that these whiffs of spray, these pinkish balls, were, now that the light burnt a <sup>greener</sup> little clearer, children, new born babies, tossed by-the from the top of the waves, cast off by the rapidity of the sea...the worm like, eel like, half conscious yet <sup>animals</sup> blindly impulsive & violent actions of these little bald brats. And soon the beach was covered with their markings. Soon they were staggering across the sand,& leaving foot prints ...all across...its blankness.(H,62)

This realm of inchoate motility, constituted by impulsive movements of muscles - Kristeva's chora - is anterior to meaning; nothing is yet regulated into patterns of signification, though the world is pregnant with the possibility of meaning. Some bird 'pattered out a few irrelevant bars of sound so bland'(H, 60); 'There seemed to be beginnings or endings of meaning everywhere'(H, 61).



In the dim light in which 'one could scarcely distinguish anything'(H, 60) waves tumbled over 'innumerable children'(H, 62) who are mere 'pullulating', 'bubbling', 'pinkish rings of flesh'(H, 63): 'And how discriminate?'(H, 62). In this inchoate pre-subjectivity the monologues are dominated by semiotic elements. The characters in the novel see shapes, colours, hear sounds; and a two-beat rhythm -- 'in and out', 'up and down', 'one, two; one, two; one, one, two' -- pulses across their monologues. This wave rhythm persists strongly throughout the book and constitutes a most distinct characteristic of its writing, to which I shall return.<sup>8</sup> Out of this primitive state, separation and difference emerge. In the Latin class Neville will later discover that 'each tense....means differently. There is an order in this world; there are distinctions, there are differences in this world, upon whose verge I step. For this is only a beginning'(W, 15). This learning of lexical and syntactic organization, namely the entry into the symbolic order, is also the beginning of subjectivity, and with it, of individuality and personality. Hence Bernard makes 'a wonderful discovery': 'I am myself, not Neville'(170). Thus each character 'elaborates' and 'differentiates' him/herself (83), using their friends to measure their own stature (65). In youth self-identity is formed and asserted ferociously; the six characters become separate and sing his/her own song like eager birds which descend 'dry-beaked, ruthless, abrupt', spying a snail, and tap 'the shell against a stone'(78). The 'film of semi-transparent yellow' for which Woolf envelops one's being has now solidified: 'A shell forms upon the soft soul, nacreous, shiny, upon which sensations tap their beaks in vain'(181). For The Waves, age 'matures' only in the sombre sense that the sequence of days and years hardens the receptive, trembling film of being to a shell which is called 'identity': 'the being grows rings; identity becomes robust'(186).

But self-identity is never something which is given and fixed once and for all. It is a continuous intermixture, the dispersal and

reassembly of diverse elements, Kristeva's subject in process. Woolf's concept of personality is never essentialist, though the theme of her work is often a quest for the essence of a character. The quest is always accompanied by a sense of the impossibility of fixing the essence, for there is no inherent substantiality to the personality, which turns out to be the concurrence of all surrounding elements. For just as the narrator of Jacob's Room realised that 'part of this is not Jacob but Richard Bonamy - the room; the market carts; the hour; the very moment of history'(JR, 71), so too Bernard can never definitively grasp his identity: 'what am I? There is no stability in this world...We are for ever mixing ourselves with unknown quantities'(W, 84). 'Abnormally aware of circumstances'(55) and susceptible to atmosphere, Bernard is 'made and remade continually'(96). Identity is never pure, unitary and immanent. 'For there is nothing to lay hold of...there is something that comes from outside and not from within'(96). As the narrator of 'Street Hunting' remarked, 'circumstances compel unity; for convenience sake a man must be a whole'(CE, 4:161), and Bernard's self-identity is triggered only by the gaze of the other: 'To be contracted by another person into a single being - how strange'(W, 64). In solitude, without 'the stimulus of other people'(58) which constitutes part of his character(95), Bernard's sense of himself becomes vagrant, vague, loses its shape(83). Walking in a street alone, no longer shaped by the gaze of others, his sense of identity fades out: 'I am not, at this moment, myself'(82). But it is not a once and for all dissolution of self that Bernard experiences; his self-identity somehow always returns - 'my self, who always comes at a call'(55). 'It steals in through some crack in the structure - one's identity. I am not part of the street - no, I observe the street. One splits off, therefore'(82). The separation of oneself, as subject, from the surrounding world coincides with the acquisition of language. In psychoanalytic terms, subjectivity is achieved with the entrance into the



symbolic order from the Imaginary, dyadic relation with the mother, with the acceptance of the third term (the Name-of-the-Father), namely, the comprehension of mediation, the separation of word from the thing itself. This ability to erect himself as subject and situate the other as object makes language possible for Bernard; he is 'a natural coiner of words'(82). 'And, striking off these observations spontaneously, I elaborate myself; differentiate myself'(83). His experience of continual alternation between an integrated assertion of identity and its dissolution makes Bernard a would-be novelist: 'Underneath, and, at the moment when I am most disparate, I am also integrated'(55). Only with the integration of selfhood in the thetic phase is language possible. But integration at the same time hampers his writing and defeats him when complete fusion is needed. 'The real novelist, the perfectly simple human being, could go on, indefinitely, imagining. He would not integrate, as I do'(58). This is not correct, however, for as Kristeva emphasizes, 'without the completion of the thetic phase' - the integrating faculty - 'no signifying practice is possible', and so art must 'not relinquish the thetic even while pulverizing it'. This 'unstable yet forceful positing of the thetic' is crucial for poetic practice. What is at stake is Kristeva's impossible dialectic: a permanent alternation between identity and its loss.<sup>9</sup> So here, as elsewhere, Woolf's Utopian idea of androgyny is expressed, though only partially, for Bernard is after all a failed novelist. Partially caricaturing himself, Bernard describes himself as an androgynous being: '"joined to the sensibility of a woman"..."Bernard possessed the logical sobriety of a man"'; 'the double capacity to feel, to reason'(55). For Woolf, writing should be such an androgynous alternation, an impossible dialectic which aims to be 'integrated' at the moment of maximum dispersal, for her ambition is to summon 'silence' into the order of speech, to reintroduce the excluded and repressed into the order which is possible only by that exclusion of 'the other'. This permanent

alternation between the integration of the thetic subject and its dissolution, lived by Bernard as would-be novelist, is what the novel itself attempts to embody, as it was what Woolf most deeply pondered in the problem of writing.

It is Bernard who is most acutely aware of the vagrant, non-homogeneous nature of selfhood: 'not one and simple, but complex and many'(55). But in fact not only Bernard but all the characters of The Waves (except Jinny) confront the same query in their monologues: 'what am I?' Comparing himself with Bernard, Neville boasts that 'I am one person - myself. I do not impersonate Catullus, whom I adore'(63), but he, too, has the same ultimate uncertainty about his own identity. 'I do not know myself sometimes, or how to measure and name and count out the grains that make me what I am'(60). His account of the blurred frontiers between self and other is exactly parallel to Bernard's sense of fusion with the other. 'As he approaches I become not myself but Neville mixed with somebody - with whom? - with Bernard?...Who am I?'(60). Though Susan represents a simplicity of 'love and hate', purely feminine'(175), 'in accordance with the high but unemphatic beauty of pure style'(176), and is destined to live in contentment or 'natural happiness'(123), she too asks herself, 'But who am I...?'(70). Louis assumes a rigidly definite identity. 'I, and again I, and again I. Clear, firm, unequivocal, there it stands, my name. Clear-cut and unequivocal am I too'(118). His is the egoistic, assertive self of a Mr. Ramsay, a Charles Tansley or a Miss Kilman, the kind of domineering self that Woolf categorizes - and condemns - as characteristically male in A Room of One's Own. As an efficient and successful agent of Imperialist capitalism(119), Louis necessarily embodies this hated 'masculine' ego; he is 'acrid, suspicious, domineering, difficult' and 'formidable'(85). He loves authority and orderly progress(24-25), and erases individual differences for the sake of generality (114, 121). Clearly Louis belongs



to that realm of voracious ego/fascism which Woolf most hates.<sup>10</sup> But this domineering self is the result of a frantic defensive manoeuvre prompted by Louis's inferiority complex as 'the weakest, youngest'(69, 155), an 'alien, external' being of colonial (Australian) origin. What 'redeems' Louis is that at least he knows this, that the 'masterful' ego is a persona adopted consciously. Perhaps in any case the machismo of the domineering self is a defensive rejection of its own 'feminine' or maternal element, the fear of a difference or heterogeneity necessarily existing in oneself.<sup>11</sup> Louis explicitly images himself as a baby - 'my shivering, my tender, and infinitely young and unprotected soul'(155), 'I am naked'(69). Though he respects Susan and desires the maternal safety she represents, it is in fact Rhoda, who has no trace of the maternal, that Louis chooses as his lover. In contrast to Susan, Louis has known 'little natural happiness'(143); he is never at ease, for he has to sever himself from the mother by force of will. He is 'stiff from force of will'; Sara Ruddick aptly borrows this phrase from Jacob's Room to describe Louis.<sup>12</sup> Memory of the initial union with the mother, of dependence on her, is a threat to his ego and his gender identity as a male, though he can never finally escape it. Hence in a powerful image he evokes his disgust and guilt at his own former dependence on the mother: 'I am like some vast sucker, some glutinous, some adhesive, some insatiable mouth'(143). The mother must be rejected as 'abject', for only by this 'abjection' can the human subject form itself as subject, separating off the other as object.<sup>13</sup> Because he is 'not single and entire', but diverse, multiple, heterogeneous - 'I have lived a thousand lives already'(91), Louis must strive all the more to shore up a singular, unitary selfhood. 'But now I am compact; now I am gathered together this fine morning'(119). 'I, now a duke, now Plato, companion of Socrates; the tramp of dark men and yellow men migrating east, west, north and south...all the furled and close-packed leaves of my many-folded life are now summed in my name'(119). Determined to be 'a full-

grown man', he aims to impose his name, his ego onto the world, 'for if I deviate...I shall fall like snow and be wasted'(119). His will for integration extends to the whole world, indeed to the whole history of the human race, and his megalomaniac ambition is, Bernard notes, to make 'some grand total'(66), or in his own words, to reduce all the diversity and difference of life 'to one line capable of linking all in one'(155), to erase individuality into universality: 'if we submit he will reduce us to order'(114). Louis even smooths out Percival's death: 'all deaths are one death'(121). Louis's ambition to write one poem which plaits into 'one cable the many threads...of our long history, of our tumultuous and varied day'(144) and which will resolve the 'discrepancies and incoherences'(143) is an aspect of this desperate need to maintain a unified selfhood.

I take the trees, the clouds, to be witnesses of my complete integration. I, Louis, I...am born entire, out of hatred, out of discord...Now grass and trees, the travelling air...and our ring here, sitting...hint at some other order, and better, which makes a reason everlastingly. This I see for a second, and shall try to-night to fix in words, to forge in a ring of steel...(28)

The subjection of the whole universe to reason and order would secure the integrity of the self. 'Meeting and parting, we assemble different forms, make different patterns. But if I do not nail these impressions to the board and out of the many men in me make one; exist here and now and not in streaks and patches...then I shall fall like snow and be wasted'(121).

When Louis speaks of the necessity to unify many selves into one whole, he reminds us of Rhoda who is precisely destined to 'fall like snow and be wasted', unable to form the self into a unified whole, unable to exist 'here and now'(159). As a child, Rhoda is the only one who cannot write the answer in the mathematics lesson: 'But I cannot write...The figures mean nothing now. Meaning has gone. The clock



ticks...Look, the loop of the figure is beginning to fill with time; it holds the world in it...The world is entire, and I am outside of it, crying "Oh save me, from being blown for ever outside the loop of time!"'(15). The symbolic order is a temporal order, as Kristeva insists in About Chinese Women; 'For the speaking animal, it is the clock of objective time: it provides the reference point, and, consequently, all possibilities of measurement, by defining a past, a present, and a future.'<sup>14</sup> While the other children, inserted into the symbolic order, learn and form a stable relationship with words each in his or her own way, Rhoda does not. She continually feels that she bears a false relationship to speech; she cannot say this or that, yes or no, in the decisive way that Susan and Jinny can: 'But I lie; I prevaricate'(76-77). She is conscious, beyond her own difficulties with language, of everybody's 'lying tongues'(77). For Rhoda, language itself is false; these lies are not just contingent stratagems but are structural to discourse. Being 'broken into separate pieces', being 'no longer one'(76), Rhoda can neither judge, name, nor be logical. 'I am not composed enough...to make even one sentence. What I say is perpetually contradicted'(77). 'Composed' has both its straightforward implication that she is nervous, 'afraid of the door opening and the leap of the tiger'(77), and also a more radical sense, for Rhoda is not formed into the unified subject that could wield speech; she is merely 'separate pieces'. Her uneasy relationship with language and her exclusion from time mutually imply each other. Kristeva writes that 'there is no time without speech. Therefore, no time without the father. That's what the father means: sign and time'.<sup>15</sup> Significantly 'Rhoda has no father'(14), and she is excluded from and rejects genealogical continuity, temporal order, the clock of objective time. When 'the identity becomes robust'(182), Bernard images this full, self-possessed entry into the symbolic order as a clock which expands and contracts in an unswerving rhythm:

Opening and shutting, shutting and opening, with increasing hum and sturdiness, the haste and fever of youth are drawn into service until the whole being seems to expand in and out like the mainspring of a clock. How fast the stream flows from January to December!...And the little fierce beat -- tick-tack, tick-tack -- of the pulse of one's mind took on a more majestic rhythm...We are the continuers, we are the inheritors, I said, thinking of my sons and daughters...(183)

But Louis and Rhoda both contradict Bernard's momentary conviction 'that we marry, that we domesticate'(183) within the 'machine' of the symbolic order.

Interestingly, these two figures who refuse/are unable to take a place in the passing on of a family lineage are both instances of the unsuccessful repression of the mother - a repression necessary to place oneself in the family triangle and thus enter the socio-symbolic order. Both Louis and Rhoda have exactly the same self-image as 'the youngest', 'the most naked', 'exposed', 'unprotected'(69,76,155) and accordingly seek protection. In Louis this dependence of the vulnerable baby on the mother provokes guilt, disgust and rejection, as I pointed out above, although at the same time he seeks women's sympathy: 'I have an immeasurable desire that women should sigh in sympathy. I have eaten no lunch to-day in order that Susan may think me cadaverous and that Jinny may extend to me the exquisite balm of her sympathy'(91). Rhoda yearns for 'mothers from whose wide knees skirts descend' to hide and protect her(76). At moments the text inscribes the image of union with and separation from the mother with moving explicitness. Neville in his 'passive and exhausted frame of mind' longs 'to rejoin the body of our mother from whom we have been severed'(165); London is 'some ponderous, maternal, majestic animal'(80) into whose flanks Bernard in the train is going to 'explode'. Bernard remembers the first day of going to school as 'a second severance from the body of our mother'(89).

Driven out of the socio-temporal order, Rhoda has to live a fragmented time; for her, 'one moment does not lead to another'(93).



I cannot make one moment merge in the next. To me they are all violent, all separate; and if I fall under the shock of the leap of the moment you will be on me, tearing me to pieces. I have no end in view. I do not know how to run minute to minute and hour to hour, solving them by some natural force until they make the whole and indivisible mass that you call life.(93)

For Rhoda, who has only moments, maturation and teleology are impossible; she cannot believe that she will 'grow old in pursuit and change'(93).

There is indeed no belief in maturation or purposive change throughout the whole novel. 'Nobody, I thought, ever changes the attitude in which we saw them first, or the clothes'(193). Bernard's opinion is a fundamental tenet of the book too. The style and vocabulary of the six characters do not change from the first monologues of childhood to their last; images which serve as indices to distinguish the six are fixed and repeated throughout the text. Fragmentariness is also as characteristic of the time of the book as of Rhoda herself. Woolf noted her intention of writing only 'moments' in the new book which eventually became The Waves:

I mean to eliminate all waste, deadness, superfluity: to give the moment whole; whatever it includes. Say that the moment is a combination of thought; sensation; the voice of the sea. Waste, deadness, come from the inclusion of things that don't belong to the moment; this appalling narrative business of the realist: getting on from lunch to dinner: it is false, unreal, merely conventional.(WD, 139)

This notion of 'the moment' is explicated later in 'A Sketch of the Past'. 'Exceptional moments' of being involve 'a sudden violent shock' which ruptures the 'sealed vessels'(MB, 122) of Woolf's being, tearing her out of the ruck of the mundane ('non-being', 'non-descript cotton wool'(MB, 70)), into either absolute despair or a fulfilling sense of wholeness (MB, 71). Those aspects of life which consist of walking, eating, everyday business, washing, cooking(MB, 70) are regarded as deadness and superfluity. On the level of fictional form, this mundane sequence is the narrativity of the realist novel which Woolf had been

condemning since 'Modern Fiction' and again in her diary entry quoted above; it is a materiality (cotton wool) which blots out the light. The Waves enacts a denigration of 'general sequence' both formally and thematically. Bernard's attitude to 'the usual order'(111), is profoundly ambivalent.

Here am I marching up and down this terrace alone, unoriented. But observe how dots and dashes are beginning, as I walk, to run themselves into continuous lines, how things are losing the bald, the separate identity that they had as I walked up those steps. The great red pot is now a reddish streak in a wave of yellowish green. The world is beginning to move past me like the banks of a hedge when the train starts, like the waves of the sea when a steamer moves. I am moving too, am becoming involved in the general sequence when one thing follows another and it seems inevitable that the tree should come, then the telegraph-pole, then the break in the hedge. And as I move, surrounded, included and taking part, the usual phrases begin to bubble up...(134)

This general sequence is more often resented as something that, impeding 'the moment', is viewed as dead matter stifling truth and light ('cotton wool'). Even when Bernard welcomes it, he does so with an undertone of scorn or condescension, as when he talks of the complacent life of little shop keepers (166,186). 'Life is pleasant. Life is good. The mere process of life is satisfactory...Something always has to be done next. Tuesday follows Monday; Wednesday Tuesday...So the being grows rings; identity becomes robust'(185-186). But for The Waves identity is as constrictive as it is desirable. Bernard later reflects on the 'arbitrary' process of character construction in a decidedly dismissive figure: 'But why impose my arbitrary design? Why stress this and shape that and twist up little figures like the toys men sell in trays in the street?'(134) Though Bernard says, 'Heaven be praised...we need not whip this prose into poetry'(186), it is not without a sort of resignation. Plot is the equivalent, at the level of macro-structure, of the sentence in linguistic microstructure, and Woolf is similarly dissatisfied with the linearity of language itself, which is powerless to



give full expression to the polymorphous experience of simultaneous being:

the power of music, the stimulus of sight, the effect on us of the shape of trees or the play of colour, the emotions bred in us by crowds, the obscure terrors and hatreds which come so irrationally in certain places or from certain people, the delight of movement, the intoxication of wine. Every moment is the centre and meeting-place of an extraordinary number of perceptions which have not yet been expressed. Life is always and inevitably much richer than we who try to express it.(CE, 2:229)

Language necessarily fails to give the moment whole, to render it as the conjunction of an extraordinary number of perceptions - 'the senses of sight, of sound, of touch - above all, the sense of the human being, his depth and the variety of his perceptions, his complexity, his confusion, his self, in short'(CE, 2:158-159). For, as Woolf realizes, life is inevitably much richer than the 'I' which exists only in language by repressing the body, the unconscious, desire and pleasure.

Woolf's dissatisfaction with plot, sequence, narrativity is, in short, a dissatisfaction with the symbolic, which necessarily excludes the multi-sensory experience of living existence and thus calls into being the unconscious. Her constant though strictly speaking impossible aim is to write about what escapes the symbolic order; thus Terence in A Voyage Out had expressed his ambition to write a 'novel about Silence', a novel about the domain outside speech.<sup>16</sup> Woolf's rudimentary ideas for The Waves, her desire to abolish story, naming, specificity of time and place(WD, 142-143), all indicate this aim towards a 'beyond' of the symbolic. Rhoda is incapable of establishing the thetic subject which sustains the socio-symbolic order and thus is terrified by it. Her own abhorrence of the social is largely shared by the book itself: 'how you stand embedded in a substance made of repeated moments run together; are committed, have an attitude, with children, authority, fame, love, society; where I have nothing. I have no face'(W, 158). Woolf hoped that women's literature would cultivate 'poetry', as she herself attempts to

do in The Waves: 'Why admit anything to literature that is not poetry?'(WD, 139). Poetry, in this usage, involves reaching beyond 'the personal and political relationships to the wider questions which the poet tries to solve - of our destiny and the meaning of life'(CE, 2:147). In 'Narrow Bridge of Art' she adumbrates a new kind of book which might encompass all the elements which the novel, poetry and drama of the past have not been able to accommodate; and this notion came to be realised as The Waves, which she termed 'a playpoem' (WD, 137). The new novel of the future will, she writes, 'have little kinship with the sociological novel or the novel of environment...It will resemble poetry in this that it will give not only or mainly people's relations to each other and their activities together...but it will give the relation of the mind to general ideas and its soliloquy in solitude...We long for some more impersonal relationship'(CE, 2:225). The Waves accordingly refuses to be 'embedded' and 'committed' in the socio-temporal, symbolic order. There is little evidence of development or history in the book; its time is either the detached moment or 'a substance made of repeated moments' contained within no humanist or religious framework. The time of The Waves is as it were agnostic, where one has constantly to confront 'abysses of infinite space'(W, 160) and in which human history is, humbly, just 'one inch of light'(161). 'And we ourselves, walking six abreast, what do we oppose, with this random flicker of light in us that we call brain and feeling, how can we do battle against this flood; what has permanence? Our lives too stream away, down the unlighted avenues, past the strip of time, unidentified'(161). Such phrases of Bernard's closely parallel Rhoda's awareness that 'nothing persists': 'I am whirled down caverns, and flap like paper against endless corridors'(93). Their moments can never be pieced together into meaningful continuity, on however modest a scale. Bernard tries to recover 'the sense of time', but with the 'streaming darkness' in his eyes he has lost his mastery of



it(161). Meanwhile during the same visit to Hampton Court, Neville recovers time: 'Unreasonably, ridiculously...as we walk, time comes back...Three hundred years now seem more than a moment vanished against that dog...I am become a subject of King George'(161). Thus Neville, for a moment at least, places himself in a particular flow of time which carries the specific values of a once extant society, in sharp contrast to Bernard who cannot believe in the validity of historical time with its 'little figure [the King] with a golden teapot on his head' set against the 'whirling abysses of infinite space'(161). However, as Neville's adverbs - 'unreasonably, ridiculously'- betray, this is not the usual cast of his mind, for his desire is more often to eternalize the perfect moment and time: 'if that blue could stay for ever; if that hole could remain for ever; if this moment could stay for ever'(27). His passion is 'for firelight, privacy, and the limbs of one person'(37), pitting love against temporality: 'let us abolish the ticking of time's clock with one blow. Come closer'(129). Of the six characters Louis seems most to have a sense of history, feeling that he has 'lived thousands of years' (118-119), and seeking 'to mark this inch in the long, long history that began in Egypt' in a single line of poetry, 'to realise the meeting-place of past and present'(48). But what he in fact does is to wipe out all particularity and reduce it to the blandness of the universal; Louis is thus 'too universal'(37), all deaths, including Percival's, are for him 'one death'(121). He adds up people 'like insignificant items in some grand total which he is for ever pursuing'(66). In order to console himself in the petty and mediocre present, Louis has to establish continuities from the past, to assert the sameness of past and present; he views the world, finally, in the light of 'the eternal procession'(119), and not of a historical procession in which the dense particularity of an individual being or period would be irreducible to generality. For Louis, modern 'women going with attaché cases down the Strand' essentially are the women who 'went once with pitchers to the

Nile'(119).

Thus time in The Waves does not conform to canons of constructive development; it is discrete and momentary rather than continual, cyclical rather than linear. Bernard encapsulates these aspects of novelistic time in an image; 'And time', he remarks, 'lets fall its drop'. This drop forming represents the merely habitual nature of one's actions, structured by quotidian routine. 'Shave, shave, shave...The drop fell':

This drop falling has nothing to do with losing my youth. This drop falling is time tapering to a point. Time, which is a sunny pasture covered with a dancing light, time, which is widespread as a field at midday, becomes pendant. Time tapers to a point. As a drop falls from a glass heavy with some sediment, time falls. These are the true cycles, these are the true events.(131)

Experience produces mere habit, covering over truth; the practical comforts of the former efface the harsher necessities of the latter. 'As I let myself in with my latch-key I would go through that familiar ritual and wrap myself in those warm coverings'(132-133). Thus the moments of 'being' get buried in 'cotton wool'(MB, 70). When one phase of life reaches the maximum possible accumulation of habit it falls like an excessively heavy drop of water and completes itself. It does not lead with any cumulative progression or even connection into the later phase, just as it owed nothing to the previous one; it simply amounts to 'shedding one of [one's] life-skins'(134): 'some sediment formed; I formed; a drop fell; I fell - that is, from some completed experience I had emerged'(179-180). In the interval between one drop falling and the next forming, a covering 'veil' falls(133). When the illusory 'luminosity of atmosphere' of the midday field withdraws, Bernard sees 'to the bare bottom'(131), grasps 'truth'(132). 'The drop falls; another stage has been reached. Stage upon stage. And why should there be an end of stages? and where do they lead? To what conclusion?'(133).

This scepticism towards progressive, linear time and Woolf's



rejection of narrative as the 'false, unreal, merely conventional' business of the realist(WD, 139) are two aspects of the same anti-symbolic stance. For time and narrative order are sustained by the logical, unified subjectivity (Kristeva's *thetic subject*) that is constituted in the repression of the senses of sight, hearing, touch, of perceptual multiplicity or confusion(CE, 2:158-159). Though he is a born storyteller, Bernard comes to believe in story less and less: 'I have made up thousands of stories; I have filled innumerable notebooks with phrases to be used when I have found the true story, the one story to which all these phrases refer. But I have never yet found that story. And I begin to ask, Are there stories?'(W, 133). He rejects classical canons of narrative: 'it is a mistake, this extreme precision, this orderly and military progress; a convenience, a lie. There is always deep below it...a rushing stream of broken dreams, nursery rhymes, street cries, half-finished sentences and sights - elm trees, willow trees, gardeners sweeping, women writing - that rise and sink'(181). Bernard here articulates the text's own desire to embody this stream, 'alive' and 'deep' beneath the civilized surfaces of the socio-symbolic order, though in it 'there is nothing one can fish up in a spoon; nothing one can call an event'.

In his final monologue Bernard declares his weariness with beautiful phrases: 'Also, how I distrust neat designs of life that are drawn upon half-sheets of note-paper'(169). He can tell a story only by a Coleridgean 'suspension of disbelief', by provisionally assuming that life is a solid substance like a globe: 'Let us pretend that we can make out a plain and logical story, so that when one matter is dispatched - love for instance - we go on, in an orderly manner, to the next'(178). Yet life is not so rigid; it rather has 'walls of thinnest air'(182). Though his gift is language, Bernard despairs, in the face of the complexity and heterogeneity of beings, 'to order them rightly; to detach one separately, or to give the effect of the whole - again like

music'(182). Yet despite his distrust for that 'logical story' in 'an orderly manner' which 'biographic style' produces, Bernard does not repudiate it altogether, since after all it serves to hold one within civilization and sanity. One cannot so unreservedly despise the social and symbolic codes 'laid like Roman roads across the tumult of our lives, since they compel us to walk in step like civilised people with the slow and measured tread of policemen though one may be humming any nonsense under one's breath at the same time - "Hark, hark, the dogs do bark," "Come away, come away, death"'(184). The system of civilized society regulates wanton desire or vagrant dreams, achieving on its grander scale the efficiency of Bernard's humble clock(183, 185). Its guardians, like the policeman in Jacob's Room, or William Bradshaw, tell one to 'keep straight on', ignoring 'the chasms in the continuity of our ways'(95), repressing 'sudden impulses'(155), and its marvels of efficiency, like the ambulance which so impresses Peter Walsh, bolster the health and wealth of society by eliminating the 'insanity' of a Septimus Smith.

But the 'biographic style' with its Roman roads cannot fish up the 'tumult of our lives'(184), the 'rushing stream of broken dreams'(181). It dare not, as Woolf notes in 'Street Haunting', 'leave the straight lines of personality' with its series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged in order to deviate into 'footpaths that lead beneath brambles and thick tree trunks into the heart of the forest'(CE, 4:165). Bernard reflects: 'Here again there should be music. Not that wild hunting-song, Percival's music; but a painful, guttural, visceral, also soaring, lark-like, pealing song to replace these flagging, foolish transcripts - how much too deliberate! how much too reasonable!'(W, 177). Again the power of music is evoked as an alternative to the linearity of language, but this is not the song of hunters who pursue one object with unwavering determination and aggression(93); it is not the music of the emphatically masculine hero, Percival. Bernard describes linear orderliness as



'military progress' and denounces it as a 'mistake', a 'lie'(181). Thus in this chain of associations - Roman roads, policemen, hunting, Percival, the military - the smooth teleology of narrative plot and male aggressivity or even totalitarianism are clearly connected. It is this order which persecutes Rhoda: without 'attitude...children, authority, fame, love, society'(158), her life is 'the white spaces that lie between hour and hour'; and this white space will just be thrown 'into the waste-paper basket' by the symbolic order(145). Bernard seeks a 'music' close to the body, primitive (guttural and visceral) but also rhythmical and joyous (the pealing of a soaring lark). If ordered transcription, elaborate style and logical story are 'masculine', we may regard this Utopian alternative as 'feminine': 'what is the use of painfully elaborating these consecutive sentences when what one needs is nothing consecutive but a bark, a groan?'(178). Bernard wishes to get back behind the construction of language, to 'a howl; a cry'(209) which would be prior to syntax: 'a little language such as lovers use, words of one syllable such as children speak when they come into the room and find their mother sewing and pick up some scrap of bright wool, a feather, or a shred of chintz'(209). This language of or for the maternal presence would then be the Kristevan semiotic. The novel itself endorses Bernard, deploying discrete groups of words and isolate images rather than syntactical elaboration. Hence the fragmentation of the writing of The Waves: short sentences strung loosely together by semi-colons, the juxtaposition of nouns, its patterns of repetition. The very weariness and frustration that such effects produce in the reader testify to the deeply ingrained force of those conventions of plot and sequence which the novel regards as falsely produced by the 'totalitarianism' of the logocentric mind. Woolf defines the modern age as one of fragments: 'it is an age incapable of sustained effort, littered with fragments' (CE, 2:157). This is because the moderns have lost the power of 'belief' or 'conviction'(CE, 2:159); they can no longer sustain that firm

'attitude towards life, a position...a view' of the Elizabethan dramatists(CE, 2:220). And yet she defends the moderns, for they stimulate 'the senses of sight, of sound, of touch - above all, the sense of the human being, his depth and the variety of his perceptions, his complexity, his confusion, his self, in short'(CE, 2: 158-159), whereas past literature had been unable to express a mind 'full of monstrous, hybrid, unmanageable emotions'(CE, 2:219). Woolf's dissatisfaction with the literary tradition and its contemporary Edwardian representatives is by now gender-specific, not simply generational. If fragmentation of the psyche was a general experience of her age, it is seen by the woman writer as a positive force of heterogeneity, unlike her male counterparts who tend to look nostalgically back to some pre-Renaissance 'unified sensibility'.

Dissatisfaction with, even abhorrence of fixed unitary selfhood is frequently articulated by the characters of The Waves, who have a strong sense of the self as multiple and heterogeneous. Experiencing himself as 'so vast, a temple, a church, a whole universe, unconfined and capable of being everywhere on the verge of things and here too'(207), Bernard seems to experience a megalomaniac inflation of the ego rather than its fragmented dissolution, as in Rhoda's case. However, that the inflation of the ego and its dissolution come, in the end, to the same thing is indicated by the fact that this experience of Bernard's only arises in the death of his self. Neville also experiences a sense of the expansionist ego: 'I am merely "Neville" to you, who see the narrow limits of my life and the line it cannot pass. But to myself I am immeasurable'(152). In his case, too, this elated awareness of the enlargement of the ego is close to its dissemination, to a radical indifferentiation of self and world: 'a net whose fibres pass imperceptibly beneath the world. My net is almost indistinguishable from that which it surrounds. It lifts whales - huge leviathans and white



jellies, what is amorphous and wandering'. Even Louis's near manic investment in the fixity of the self in fact testifies to the insidious force of pressures working always for its dissolution. The escape into universality is always undermined by the crumbling away of the empirical ego that is trying to transcend itself: 'I smoothed my hair when I came in, hoping to look like the rest of you. But I cannot, for I am not single and entire as you are'(91). But it is Rhoda, not knowing how to make 'the whole and indivisible mass' called life(93), who feels most harried and persecuted by those who live in self-unity, and who hates 'all details of the individual life'(76). She endures agony in going 'through the antics of the individual'(158), yearning for those 'moments when the walls of the mind grow thin; when nothing is unabsorbed' and when she could for a moment fancy 'that we might blow so vast a bubble that the sun might set and rise in it and we might...cast off and escape from here and now'(159). Thus Rhoda's dream parallels Bernard's vision towards the end of the novel, and this vast illimitable consciousness beyond individuality in turn suggests the narrative consciousness of the text itself, in which scenery, character, monologue take place (see above p.237).

This abolition of the limiting walls of individuality can be experienced either as the infinitizing or the dissolution of the self; the denial of unity can be either a polymorphously perverse enjoyment of multiple selves or the agony of the fragmented self. Neville feels that his sense of self perishes in the rushing crowd; Bernard in solitude or silence is 'dissolved utterly' and becomes 'featureless and scarcely to be distinguished from another'(159). Rhoda is undone by her fellow human beings who pierce her with a 'million arrows', pinning her down and exposing her. 'What dissolution of the soul you demanded in order to get through one day'(145). The sense of psychic breakdown even produces hallucinations of corporal disintegration: 'More cruel than the old torturers, you will let me fall, and will tear me to pieces when I am

fallen'(159); 'I am broken into separate pieces; I am no longer one'(76). In trying to escape the limits of the self, Bernard had yearned to believe that it was only his body that was fixed irrevocably(153), and it is indeed the body which founds the unitary identity of the human subject. Lacanian theory shows us that it is the corporeal unity that an infant discovers and identifies with that makes of him or her a coherent human subject; this process is Lacan's 'mirror stage'. Rhoda hates looking-glasses, as we might have predicted, for the image of herself urges her to congeal into identity(31). Yet still she has to experience her totality outside her, over there in the mirror; her identity as a whole is experienced in alienation. This impassable abyss of béance between the image in the mirror and the self threatens her: 'Alone, I often fall down into nothingness. I must push my foot stealthily lest I should fall off the edge of the world into nothingness. I have to bang my head against some hard door to call myself back to the body'(31).<sup>17</sup> The most intense crisis of this kind occurs at the puddle:

I came to the puddle. I could not cross it. Identity failed me. We are nothing, I said, and fell. I was blown like a feather, I was wafted down tunnels. Then very gingerly, I pushed my foot across. I laid my hand against a brick wall. I returned very painfully, drawing myself back into my body over the grey, cadaverous space of the puddle.(46)

Between the image of herself on the surface of the water and her actual self lie 'crevices' and 'fissures'(47), from which the 'emerging monster'(47) leaps and menaces her. 'With intermittent shocks, sudden as the springs of a tiger, life emerges heaving its dark crest from the sea. It is to this we are attached; it is to this we are bound, as bodies to wild horses'(47). In this realm anterior to the entrance into the symbolic an unfocused aggressivity menaces the nascent ego: the ego is in continual struggle with the alter ego in binary relationship. 'Reckless and random the cars race and roar and hunt us to death like bloodhounds. I am alone in a hostile world. The human face is hideous'(113); you



'will tear me to pieces when I am fallen'(159). So Rhoda has ultimately no choice but to 'draw [herself] across the enormous gulf into [her] body safely'(113).

When the transcendental ego is threatened with dissolution, the mirror phase is reversed in phantasies of corporal disintegration, a terror not peculiar to Rhoda. 'Little bits of ourselves are crumbling'(166), says Bernard; and even when he is talking of the 'indivisibility' of his drowsy, exhausted body, the image he uses evokes corporeal dissection: 'if the train were to cut me in two, I should come together on the further side'(167). In similarly violent terms, Louis describes to Rhoda the other four characters at the dinner party: 'They are savage; they are ruthless. They dance in a circle, flapping bladders. The flames leap over their painted faces, over the leopard skins and the bleeding limbs which they have torn from the living body'(100). In The Waves even such casual experiences as taking the Tube become major psychical traumas, involving lurid images of being 'dissevered by all those faces'(127). Falling into crevices or nothingness, being torn to morsels by others - such images closely parallel Rhoda's psychotic fears, as does that vision of the dead man with his throat cut which had terrified Neville as a child and which comes to represent for him the 'unintelligible obstacle' or 'doom' which he cannot bypass(17-18). That the text is obsessed with the disintegration of the body can also be seen in the very intensity with which the six characters seek to compose unity or wholeness among themselves, for '[they] suffered terribly as [they] became separate bodies'(171). Recalling their dinner together in his last soliloquy, Bernard reflects dolefully: 'We saw for a moment laid out among us the body of the complete human being whom we have failed to be, but at the same time, cannot forget'(196). Though they attempt to assert individuality, 'like separated parts of one body and soul', Percival

makes them aware that such efforts are false. They create one 'circle', 'this globe': 'do not let the swing door cut to pieces the thing that we have made'(104). And this achievement is later repeated at the second dinner party. The unification into one body occurs during a communion meal in both instances, and this is not simply a contingent matter of the logistics of bringing scattered bodies socially together. The concomitant satisfaction of oral impulses perhaps suggests a phantasy return to primitive fusion at the breast.

Also marked by a certain disintegration and fragmentation is the 'body' of The Waves itself, whose formal characteristics I have already noted. Though the laws of syntax are never finally shattered, the novel does create in the reading an effect of fragmentariness, of a radical lack of sequential momentum. The novel abounds with short sentences, organized in an often simple syntax, in marked contrast to the 'chameleon style' of the earlier novels whose typically long sentences sprawl through a meandering syntax. In his major study of poetic syntax, Articulate Energy, Donald Davie identifies three traditions of syntax in poetry. The tautly organized 'strong lines' of eighteenth century verse contrast clearly with the radically fragmented syntax of, say, Ezra Pound, but between these two poles Davie identifies a third alternative: 'pseudo-syntax, a play of empty forms'.<sup>18</sup> For in Symbolist poetry syntax is, on the surface, intact, yet in fact has no function, carries no charge of meaningful articulation, in a poetry that is structured according to principles of sound, rhythm, imagery. It is such a syntax that Woolf's novels operate, and in The Waves in particular, syntax is conspicuously subordinated to an organization of rhythm, phonic or semantic repetition:

There is a dancing and a drumming, like the dancing and the drumming of naked men with assagais(100)

doors will open and shut, will keep on opening and shutting...(111)



I am no longer young. I am no longer part of the procession. Millions descend those stairs in a terrible descent...Millions have died. Percival died. I still move. I still live(137)

This is the prelude, this is the beginning. I glance, I peep, I powder...This is my calling. This is my world. All is decided and ready; the servants, standing here, and again here, take my name, my fresh, my unknown name, and toss it before me. I enter.(73)

Such repetition of the personal pronoun between two adjectives -my fresh, my unknown name - is a stylistic oddity which is maintained throughout the text, and shows repetition at work in the micro-structures of the novel's language as well as orchestrating whole paragraphs or pages at a time.

Since it produces strong rhythmic effects, repetition foregrounds the phonetic properties or materiality of language at the expense of linear narrative development. By reintroducing words or phrases from the previous sentence, or redeploying a simple, emphatic syntactic structure, repetition and tautology activate the paradigmatic axis of language, which would otherwise be excluded by the developmental urgency of the syntagmatic chain, and in so doing they begin to dissolve the syntagma. The language of The Waves shows a consistent reluctance to give up the paradigmatic substitutions which in practice have to be repressed as the 'Other' in order that meaning may be produced along the syntagmatic chain. The novel tends to explore the vertical axis, playing associational variations on a single signifier which, as Saussure pointed out, 'will unconsciously call to mind a host of other words' from the paradigm.<sup>19</sup> Lacan has argued that the coherence of the subject is produced along the syntagmatic chain: 'strict coherence in the syntagmatic chain provides a position for the transcendental ego'.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, to unleash the paradigm, to juxtapose rather than to subordinate signifiers, is to threaten that security. The Waves manipulates discrete clusters of words or isolated images which are not neatly pigeon-holed in an elaborate syntactic hierarchy. Its philosophy

of language is articulated by Bernard, who is tired of stories and phrases that 'come down beautifully with all their feet on the ground'(169): 'what is the use of painfully elaborating these consecutive sentences when what one needs is nothing consecutive but a bark, a groan'(178). Thus the set images of each character, their distinctive bark or groan as it were, recur throughout the text without their reappearances being governed locally by logical connections or narrative necessity. Woolf had jotted in her diary: 'I am sure that this is the right way of using them [images and symbols] - not in set pieces, as I had tried at first, coherently, but simply as images, never making them work out; only suggest'(WD, 169). On this showing, Donald Davie's description of Symbolist poetry again has a bearing on The Waves: 'a poem which works by the arrangement of images, letting the meaning flow unstated, as it were, from the space between them'. 'It follows', he continues, 'that dislocation of syntax is essential to all poems written in this tradition'.<sup>21</sup> It may be that the novel, as genre, exercises stronger syntagmatic constraints than operate in lyric poetry, but if Woolf does not dislocate syntax, even in Rhoda's most extreme assertions of psychic breakdown, she certainly goes a long way towards emptying syntax of its function of articulation across the novel as a whole. Yet the novel is divided about the consequences of this. Bernard rejects sequentiality, but also knows that 'without [it] we should be undone'(166); syntax is one major element of those psychic 'Roman roads' which maintain the self within sanity and civilization. In this phase Bernard would doubtless concur with Donald Davie (who has Pound's Cantos in mind) that 'to dislocate syntax in poetry is to threaten the rule of law in the civilised community'.<sup>22</sup> Yet still he has, like the novel in which he features, a desire to pursue the paradigmatic, to 'play ducks and drakes with all these phrases'(184).

The arrangement of the monologues is a further device contributing to the novel's effect of broken stasis. Though described by its author



as a 'play-poem'(WD, 137), the text has no dramatic impetus. Its monologues are not addressed to each other, they achieve no dramatic interaction, and only follow one another within a general chronology that does not establish close local links of logic or sequence. Not only at the level of its individual sentences but also between its major units of monologue, the text tends not to establish syntagmatic relationships of implication, causality or subordination. The monologues are organized by parataxis rather than syntax. Laid in juxtaposition, they do not aim for tight closure in the larger syntagmatic chains of the novel, and the reader is again deprived of the fixed, unitary subject position that brings about Kristevan 'thesis'; the resultant anxiety will usually emerge in the reading as frustration and tedium. These effects are reinforced by a lack of drama within the speeches as well as between them. Rhythm rather than dramatic interaction was Woolf's major concern in this 'series of dramatic soliloquies': 'the thing is to keep them running homogeneously in and out, in the rhythm of the waves'(WD, 159). The hard, external linguistic mode of the soliloquies denies the reader the pleasures of 'inwardness', of the intimate access to subjectivity that the stream of consciousness, for example, affords. Dislocation of syntax runs the risk of being recuperated as a more faithful transcription of a disordered but none the less basically unitary (even lyrical) subjectivity; this has been the fate of Pound's Pisan Cantos. Woolf avoids that danger, first, by emptying rather than fracturing syntax, and, second, by a rhetoric of externality that rebuffs her reader's empathy.

The Woolfian novel must convey the uncircumscribed spirit 'whatever aberration or complexity it may display'. It must reproduce the order in which the atoms impinge on the mind, 'however disconnected and incoherent in appearance'(CE, 2:106-107). But even so Woolf was worried about the fragmentation of The Waves, for 'everything in a work of art should be

mastered and ordered' as well(CE, 2:228). In February 1930 she wrote: 'Lord how I wonder if I shall pull this book off! It is a litter of fragments so far'(WD, 154). In one sense, the novel has a very rigid form and order. It is structured by the temporally progressive interludes, which also effect a rough parallelism between the position of the sun and the phase of the characters' lives. But this rigid framework can perhaps be seen as opportunistic, as a concession to the 'disabilities' of a contemporary readership. In a letter to Ethyl Smyth, Woolf remarked: 'I think then that my difficulty is that I am writing to a rhythm and not to a plot...And thus though the rhythmical is more natural to me than the narrative, it is completely opposed to the tradition of fiction and I am casting about all the time for some rope to throw to the reader'(L, 4:204). Another such guide for the reader is given in Bernard's final soliloquy, which Woolf clearly intends to produce an effect of summary or synthesis and 'absorb all those scenes' (WD, 162). Yet this long soliloquy of Bernard's results only in a mere restatement of all the previous scenes without throwing any new light or perspective on them, and it thus increases the reader's sense of monotony. After her attempt to pulverize the 'false, unreal, merely conventional' narrative sequence into 'moments'(WD, 139), Woolf now worries about a possible excess of fragmentation. From Julia Kristeva's viewpoint, such anxiety is a necessary component of the creation of art: 'a text, in order to hold together as a text...requires a completion [finition], a structuration, a kind of totalization of semiotic motility. This completion constitutes a synthesis that requires the thesis of language in order to come about, and the semiotic pulverizes it only to make it a new device'(RPL, 51). The more Woolf destroys the thesis, the more rigid control she in another sense requires. If she dissolves the sequentiality of narrative, she must also introduce a more rigid - almost rebarbatively so - formal sequence. If she lets rhythm empty syntax, the syntax now none the less becomes far more stiff and straightforward,



losing its earlier 'meandering' qualities. The overall effect shifts from the 'fluent and fluid' to 'solidity'(WD, 176).

Woolf repeatedly records in her diary her sense of an extreme pressure of difficulty in writing The Waves,(WD, 156-157), and this difficulty is encountered in turn by the reader. Worrying about the disintegration of the work, Woolf comes to rely on rhythm to weld the book into a unity, yet it was precisely rhythm that had fragmented the text in the first place. 'What it wants is presumably unity...Suppose I could run all the scenes together more? - by rhythms chiefly'(WD, 163). Throughout The Waves effects of rhythm pulse, pass, recur, especially the two-beat rhythm of wave movement itself; rhythmic patterns or images of in/out, up/down, rise/fall appear innumerable throughout the text: 'Lifts rise and fall; trains stop, trains start as regularly as the waves of the sea'(139). Another recurrent rhythm finds momentary expression in Louis's image of the mainspring, used to evoke the tempo of life in his eating house:

It is like a waltz tune, eddying in and out, round and round. The waitresses, balancing trays, swing in and out, round and round, dealing plates of greens, of apricot and custard, dealing them at the right time, to the right customers. The average men, including her rhythm in their rhythm ('I would take a tenner; for it blocks up the hall') take their greens, take their apricots and custard...Here is the central rhythm; here the common mainspring. I watch it expand, contract; and then expand again (67-68)

Yet Louis is 'not included'. He hates this 'cheap and worthless' pulsation, attempts to quell this subterranean rhythm into order. On this issue, as on so many others, then, he is counterposed to Bernard who declares that 'the rhythm is the main thing in writing'(57). It is also by the power of rhythm that Neville arrives at the conviction that he is a poet: 'Now begins to rise in me the familiar rhythm; words that have lain dormant now lift, now toss their crests, and fall and rise, and fall and rise again. I am a poet, yes'(59). In 'Letter to a Young Poet'

Woolf expands on the significance of rhythm in the writing of poetry. Addressed to a young poet, this essay none the less bears upon The Waves, which she had called a 'playpoem'. She meditates on 'the most profound and primitive of instincts, the instinct of rhythm':

All you need now is to stand at the window and let your rhythmical sense open and shut, open and shut, boldly and freely, until one thing melts in another...until a whole has been made from all these separate fragments...Then let your rhythmical sense wind itself in and out among men and women, omnibuses, sparrows...until it has strung them together in one harmonious whole. That perhaps is your task...to absorb every experience that comes your way fearlessly and saturate it completely...to re-think human life into poetry and so give us tragedy again and comedy by means of characters not spun out at length in the novelist's way, but condensed and synthesized in the poet's way.(CE, 2:191)

'Most profound and primitive of instincts', rhythm is central to Kristeva's semiotic which becomes more or less integrated into the signifier, and even after the acquisition of language it is a necessary accompaniment to adult speech or even the highest flights of rational thought. It becomes dominant and breaks through the thetic elements of language in The Waves, subduing all the elements that are conventionally expected in a novel. Repetition and tautology, multiplied for the sake of the rhythmical wave-effects, persistently hinder linear narrative development; small-scale, local effects of inertia ultimately give the effect of a universe of entropy, a term which is pejorative only from that teleological viewpoint that the text here puts in question. "'What is lost? What is over?" And "Over and done with," I muttered, "over and done with," solacing myself with words'(131). 'A child playing - a summer evening - doors will open and shut, will keep opening and shutting...'(111).

The conventional concept of character is no less eroded by rhythm, for the same rhythms pervade the six figures equally and blur the boundaries and extend the margins of self; a kind of choric dimension is thus given even to the most intimate of self-revelations.<sup>23</sup> 'The



tautology is there for the sake of the rhythm and is not in character', and The Waves is thus difficult, Hermione Lee continues, 'to read as a novel, in that the emphasis on rhythm overwhelms distinctions of character'.<sup>24</sup> This 'difficulty' is of course not a critique of the text, but rather precisely its point. If rhythm is the most profound and primitive of the instincts, repetition is hardly less so. 'The compulsion to repeat is an ungovernable process in the unconscious', and in elaborating the theory of Wiederholungszwang Freud finally sees repetition 'as the expression of the most general character of the instincts'.<sup>25</sup> The Waves as it were consciously decides to give the reins to unconscious impulse, to 'let [the] rhythmical sense open and shut, open and shut...wind itself in and out'(CE, 2:191), that is, to let the semiotic play dissolvingly across discourse. Introduced in order to guarantee uniformity, rhythm itself ironically loses freedom, since everything in the text is now reduced to the same rhythmical pattern. The very extremity of Woolf's challenge to conventional narrative unity, as she abandons 'casting a line to make my book the right shape' (WD, 153), curiously ends by undercutting its own radicalism. Resenting the homogeneity of narrative, The Waves itself none the less actually impoverishes heterogeneity in another sense, cancelling out the flowing, polyphonic richness of the earlier novels into a monotonous uniformity.

Woolf's second and more thematic device to give unity to the text is the figure of Percival. As a charismatic personality who draws the six characters together, he is the hero who generates a 'common feeling'(104) or 'communion'(96) by smoothing away the pugnacious assertion of egotistic differences. As in To the Lighthouse, the epiphanic moment occurs during a dinner-party; 'a steel-blue circle beneath' becomes evident, 'a globe whose walls are made of Percival, of youth and beauty'. Again as in the earlier novel, this moment of wholeness is contrasted with an 'outside'(101) of Darwinian nature, of dangerous flux: 'do not let the swing door cut to pieces the thing that we have made, that globes

itself here, among these lights'(104). But whereas Mrs. Ramsay is a passive guardian of the human light or interior, Percival is a male hero whose mission it is to spread the light into hitherto benighted regions of the world; he aims to solve 'the Oriental problem' by opposing 'a sense of the uselessness of human exertion'(97). Thus the symbolic moment experienced by the six characters and Percival is presented as the triumph of civilization, of human creativity, against the lightless flux of nature: 'we too, as we put on our hats and push open the door, stride not into chaos, but into a world that our own force can subjugate and make part of the illumined and everlasting road'(105). In the second reunion at Hampton Court, with the characters now middle-aged and Percival dead, the moment of 'illumination' or 'one life' once again blazes against the dark 'abysses of space'(162), but only fitfully: 'The moment was all; the moment was enough'(197). For the sense of an ungovernable flux is more acute, the 'illimitable chaos'(160) more menacing than previously.

If pessimism becomes more difficult to resist as the characters age, it is also reinforced by the death of Percival, the loss of the centre he had once been. In his role as absent centre, Percival has strong affinities with Jacob Flanders. Adored by the other characters, in whose consciousness he occupies a near-obsessive place, Percival himself is silent; his mind, like Jacob's, is a lacuna in the text. Like his predecessor, he too possesses an enviable lack of self-consciousness. 'Not a thread, not a sheet of paper lies between him and the sun', remarks Neville(35); he is 'oblivious, almost entirely ignorant'(43) of the entanglements of consciousness. Percival's attraction is precisely this immediacy and solidity, his natural 'truthful[ness]'(111); like Jacob, he approaches an ideal unity of form and meaning. For Louis, Percival 'inspires poetry'(29); he is the object of a poetic consciousness that can aspire towards reality only through the mediate



measure of words. His death too is a Fall, casting doubt on the human project of shaping nature into meaning; 'His horse tripped. He was thrown'(107), and he dies an obscure and pointless death. (The image of the riderless horse occurs towards the end of Jacob's Room, serving as a bleak, ironic commentary on the earlier image of Jacob's masterful riding - JR, 163,97). Both texts are in deep ways ambivalent about the relation - cause or effect? - of the hero's death to the fallen world, but because in The Waves the action of the novel, the lives of the characters, extend beyond Percival's death, it is their interpretation, which sees his death as cause, which predominates. The 'centre' of the world has become 'empty'(W, 109,111,194); Neville laments 'the depravity of the world' and suffers from 'bitterness and rancour'(129). The name Percival necessarily evokes the Grail legend, and critics have pointed out various parallels between the two Percivals. Both are in a sense failed heroes, not having lived up to their original promise. Percival not only fails in the quest for the Grail, but actually brings forth the Waste Land.<sup>26</sup>

Maria DiBattista points out the abundance of 'veils' in The Waves, both as descriptive metaphors and as narrative technique(150). She argues that the veil masks the narrator whose power and voice will control the ensuing narrative. Veils are 'narrative garments, strategies, and ploys that permit the "she" behind The Waves to speak'(150-1). DiBattista also usefully reminds us that Percival's name 'denotes in its original French, to pierce the veil (perce-voile)'(152). She concludes that Percival is an inspired name for the hero of a narrative so concerned with the powers of dissimulation and obsessed with the recovery of the departed past - the memory of Thoby Stephen - that Woolf confides to her diary. Inconspicuously but persistently, the text is indeed full of images of veil, net, film, fabric, which serve either for metaphors of mind or consciousness, its delicate films of nerves and perceptions(W, 35, 84, 97, 142, 171, 182), or for the system of signs which constitutes and is constituted by consciousness(127), or, finally, for

the muffling layer of daily habit. This series of linked images thus rejoins the famous image of the 'luminous halo', that 'semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end'. As *perce-voile*, Percival comes to signify a hole punched through the veil of consciousness; he is a lacuna in the consciousness of the text, the lack of self-consciousness, representing (but that word already denotes a mediacy he has happily never known) an Edenic relationship to the word. As I suggested above in relation to Jacob's Room, such immediacy is the fortunate identity of signifier and signified; in The Waves Percival is the condition of possibility of their coincidence. The death of Percival is the death of both the symbolic ideal and the utopian community, which are the two modes of fusing organically the disparate and contingent.

However, Percival is ambivalent in the same way as Jacob Flanders. For if the veil is truly an envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness, then to pierce the 'veil of being'(209) is to run the risk of death. Percival's name thus foreshadows his own premature death. 'Pierce (the) veil' suggests the fundamental aggressiveness and violence of this masculine hero - aspects of the male nature which were revealed in the boy Jacob's enthusiasm for moth-hunting - and also carries suggestions of the male's penetration of the hymen. Associations of heroic violence pervade the images in which the characters think of Percival. For Neville, he is the equal of 'Alcibiades, Ajax, Hector': 'they loved riding, they risked their lives wantonly'(129). In contrast to the others, Percival is a man of action, a born 'leader'(26), a guardian of standards and rules rather than an open, receptive sensibility. His magnificence reminds Louis 'of some medieval commander'(26). Neville's association of Percival with the classical world for his 'straight nose', his 'blue and oddly inexpressive eyes', his 'upright and indifferent' stance, points both to his physical splendour and his less attractive potential as 'an admirable church-



warden. He should have a birch and beat little boys for misdemeanours'(25). For Percival is in the end a typical representative of patriarchy, as is attested by his finally going to India as the agent of British Imperialism. The other characters thrill to the possibility of his resolving 'the Oriental problem' 'by applying the standards of the West, by using the violent language that is natural to him' and becoming 'a God' there(96). Percival's nobility and magnificence thus shade off into more sinisterly patriarchal qualities - aggression, oppressiveness, domination. Dubbed 'conventional' by Bernard(88), Percival embodies qualities that the patriarchy values, and will assist their social diffusion. Percival's death is then both poignant and ironic, as was Jacob's: as an eminent representative of a crass patriarchy, he deserves what he gets - what he indeed virtually brings down on himself - yet he is also the system's victim, denied by it any glimpse of a viable alternative and thus still worth mourning. The text's ironic critique of Percival is articulated by Bernard, who reflects after the former's death: 'I should be able to place him in trifling and ridiculous situations...I must be able to say, "Percival, a ridiculous name"'(110). It is crucial for the novel's final position that the centre that Percival once was is emptied. Bernard again: 'he sat there in the centre. Now I go to that spot no longer. The place is empty'(109).

Adored but absent, Percival's real function is, argues DiBattista, to serve 'as a decoy figure whose function it is to divert attention from the novel's real center, the "She" not the "He" who successfully pierces the veil'. She contends that 'displacement and dissimulation are necessary to avoid all those censors of private feminine dreams', represented in the novel by, for example, St. Paul's pronouncement that women should veil themselves. But her argument is not wholly convincing, for at this stage of her career, with several successful books already behind her and her identity as a woman writer affirmed by A Room of One's Own, 'displacement and dissimulation' seem hardly necessary any longer to

enable Woolf to write. If there is such a need, then it is perhaps in order to avoid her own selfconsciousness as a woman, which, as she had often argued, was harmful to artistic creation. DiBattista further argues that 'the disguised presence and subject of the novel is the "real novelist" - Virginia Woolf, the woman writing in the seclusion of Rodmell-Elvedon'.<sup>27</sup> Certainly DiBattista is right to relate Percival to the issue of woman's writing, but he relates to it as absent centre, not as disguise.

To examine the Elvedon episode will help clarify the issue. After his visit to it as a child, this half-imaginary land haunts Bernard: 'That is Elvedon. The lady sits between the two long windows, writing. The gardeners sweep the lawn with giant brooms'(12). This 'unknown land'(12) lies 'down below, through the depth of the leaves'(170), which Bernard imagines as waves: 'We shall sink through the green air of the leaves, Susan. We sink as we run. The waves close over us, the beech leaves meet above our heads'(11). The episode is deeply connected with the question of writing: it was while Bernard was 'making phrases'(13) in an attempt to console Susan that he makes this exploration into Elvedon, and when they return from this dreamland he composes a poem about a wood-pigeon. The experience brings a kind of revelation which the boy Bernard grasps, for the first time, in language: 'a single phrase, for a hole had been knocked in my mind, one of those sudden transparencies through which one sees everything'(171). The image of the lady writing and the gardeners sweeping recurs continually to him. DiBattista claims that this woman writing is the disguised subject of the novel, and Sara Ruddick also interprets her as 'an androgynous yet recognizably female narrator'.<sup>28</sup> Bernard's occasional generalization of the lady to 'women writing' suggests that what is symbolized here is indeed female creativity and power to write. The men in the scene are characteristically ambivalent figures. As gardeners, they control Nature



to provide a locus of security where the woman can write, yet they are also reduced to the kinds of menial task (sweeping) that are conventionally allotted to women. Bernard discovers that he 'cannot interfere with a single stroke of those brooms...Nor with the fixity of that woman writing'(170-171). As 'an unknown land' or 'the ladies' garden', Elvedon seems to figure a Utopia where feminine writing can exist unthwarted.

A passage from 'The Mark on the Wall' throws light on this dream land:

Yes, one could imagine a very pleasant world. A quiet, spacious world, with the flowers so red and blue in the open fields. A world without professors or specialists or house-keepers with the profiles of policemen, a world which one could slice with one's thought as a fish slices the water with his fin...How peaceful it is down here, rooted in the centre of the world and gazing up through the grey waters, with their sudden gleams of light, and their reflections - if it were not for Whitaker's Almanack - if it were not for the Table of Precedency!(HH, 46)

This utopic realm is liberated from the masculine standards which still govern our lives, but whose ascendancy, Woolf writes earlier, has been crumbling since the First World War. This, like Elvedon, is a subaqueous world, and the 'fish' is a recurrent image in Woolf for the female thought or imagination that is quickly scared into hiding by the masculine point of view. In A Room of One's Own the narrator's 'little fish' is cowed by the Beadle who aims to protect the turf of the college; in 'Professions for Women' the girl, who is 'impeded by the extreme conventionality of the other sex'(CE, 2:278-288), cannot let her fish swim freely as she needs to be able to if she wants to write. The female imagination only flourishes in this underwater realm, in the 'stream' which lies 'deep below' the 'orderly and military progress' that Bernard condemns as 'a mistake...a convenience, a lie'(181), in a speech that directly reflects Woolf's own critique of the 'narrative business of the realist' in her diary (WD, 139 - see above p.247). Bernard counterposes

an alternative mode of being to this orderly linear progression which is both narrative and the general social order supporting/supported by this literary form. This other realm is 'a rushing stream of broken dreams, nursery rhymes, street cries, half-finished sentences and sights - elm trees, willow trees, gardeners sweeping, women writing'(181); it coexists with the linear everyday world, but remains suppressed. The turbulent stream, which is the locus of women's writing, lies beneath or outside the 'Roman roads'(184) - Bernard's phrase for the biographic style that ignores the 'tumult of our lives'. 'Since they [the Roman roads] compel us to walk in step like civilized people with the slow and measured tread of policemen', they hold us within civilization, 'though one may be humming any nonsense under one's breath at the same time'(184). This, clearly, is once more the policeman of Jacob's Room, controlling the traffic just as he represses wayward impulses and sentiments 'by force of will', and it is of this oppressive order that Percival is the major representative. Percival, narrativity and the patriarchy must be simultaneously dislodged in order to allow Elvedon and women's writing to emerge: hence it is that the centre that Percival occupies must be emptied. Bernard remarks: 'There is nothing one can fish up in a spoon; nothing one can call an event'(181) in this concealed stream, and he might well be describing Woolf's own aims in writing The Waves: 'not trying to tell a story...do away with exact place and time'(WD, 142-143). In a self-reflexive gesture, the text thus figures, in Elvedon, its own project. The woman writing is indeed the narrator of the book, that 'mind thinking' or 'she' (WD, 142-143), who had initially existed but receded from the surface of the text in its final version, and is ultimately the author of the book, Woolf herself.

Immersed in the underworld below the socio-symbolic order, Bernard is granted 'a reason', 'a sudden revelation', which he attempts at the same time to form into phrases: 'a hole had been knocked in my mind, one of those sudden transparencies through which one sees everything'(181).



In a system of images that first appeared as the 'wild goose' and 'great fish' of Orlando (O, 281-282), Bernard's revelation is symbolized as a bird or fish (W, 181), the former of which catches up the earlier incident in which he had turned the pigeon into a poem. For Bernard at Rome, in his 'moments of escape' from the quotidian sequence of daily life, 'A fin turns': 'This bare visual impression is unattached to any line of reason, it springs up as one might see the fin of a porpoise on the horizon. Visual impressions often communicate thus briefly statements that we shall in time to come uncover and coax into words. I note under F., therefore, "Fin in a waste of waters"'(134-135). Here again the novel refers back to its own inception, for The Waves itself was 'a reach after that vision', an attempt to net 'that fin in the waste of water which appeared to me over the marshes' as Woolf was coming to the end of To the Lighthouse(WD, 158, 169). Associated with the 'essence of reality'(WD, 101), the image of the fin as reality comes to her as, 'driven by loneliness and silence from the habitable world', she sinks to 'the bottom of the vessel'(WD, 148, 132) - just as Bernard had reached Elvedon by sinking 'through the green air of the leaves'(W, 11) or, in a sense, the waves. But the eruption of a hidden meaning - fin or reality - from the calm surface is deeply ambivalent, alternately benevolent and sinister. 'Frightening and exciting', it entails loneliness, 'agony', 'terror', and yet remains 'the most necessary thing to me: that which I seek'(WD, 101, 132). There is a sense of adventurous liberation from the self fixed in the socio-symbolic sequence, but also a fundamental fear of emptiness or nothingness (WD, 148, 144). The visual image varies according to the local balance of the ambivalent values. It may emerge as 'the fin of a porpoise'(134), a conventionally friendly and alert creature, or as the jutting 'spine' of some dangerous sea-monster. It is this latter, sinister vision that haunts Rhoda: 'with sudden intermittent shocks, sudden as the springs of a tiger, life emerges heaving its dark

crest from the sea. It is to this we are attached; it is to this we are bound, as bodies to wild horses...the emerging monster to whom we are attached'(47).<sup>29</sup> In a further ramification of this system of images, the fin becomes a dangerous, uncontrollable horse, which connects to the horse that involves Percival in his fatal accident and to the similar vein of imagery in Jacob's Room.

It is the power of language that governs whether 'reality' emerges as benevolent or menacing. If it can be successfully encircled by language, 'coaxed' into a coherent whole or symbol, then meaning can be created/retrieved and the human mind triumph over insensate nature. In 'A Sketch of the Past' Woolf reflects on a childhood revelation in a passage that illuminates the relation between the epiphanic moment and the power of words. In one of the 'exceptional moments' to which I referred above, she realizes in a shock of insight as she contemplates a flower: 'That is the whole', 'I found a reason'. She then analyzes this visionary shock:

I feel that I have had a blow; but it is not, as I thought as a child, simply a blow from an enemy hidden behind the cotton wool of daily life; it is or will become a revelation of some order; it is a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words. It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, a great delight to put the severed parts together...it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we...are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art...we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself. And I see this when I have a shock.(MB, 72)

To synthesize in the instantaneity of the symbol, to reduce undifferentiated matter to transparency, thus becomes a raison d'être of both literature and life. When Woolf fails in this, as she does in two other of her childhood's 'exceptional moments', she is thrown into 'a state of despair', 'a peculiar horror and a physical collapse'(MB, 71, 72). Language is thus both the means by which, and the zone in which,



the shock of submarine impulses or the 'illimitable chaos' of The Waves may be humanly mastered. It aims to 'retrieve' experience 'from formlessness with words'(191), as part of what Bernard terms 'a fight against the green woods and green fields and sheep advancing with measured tread, munching'(192) - a vision of Nature's deprivations that harks back to the 'Time Passes' section of To the Lighthouse. It was 'the presence of these enemies' (170) that had incited Bernard, even as a child, to explore Elvedon.

'Beneath the surface of a stream'(81) is the place of potential revelation, which might optimally be synthesized in language into a meaningful whole, but also of danger. Bernard expresses the positive wish for immersion in this realm beyond the symbolic order and language:

to visit the profound depths; once in a while to exercise my prerogative not always to act, but to explore; to hear vague, ancestral sounds of boughs creaking, of mammoths; to indulge impossible desires to embrace the whole world with the arms of understanding - impossible to those who act. Am I not, as I walk, trembling with strange oscillations and vibrations of sympathy...unmoored as I am from a private being...(81-82)

But these pre-civilized depths beneath the 'Roman roads' have also, as the imagery of 'mammoth' and 'ancestral sounds' here suggests, a darker aspect as the dangerous flux of Darwinian nature; 'the green woods and green fields' modulate into an 'unfeeling universe' or 'immeasurable sea'(192, 199, 201). One enters this realm by casting off the thetic self of coherent action and will, but this is simultaneously to abandon the human project of constructing chaos into an order within which we can live. Freedom from 'the burden of individual life'(80) is also a state of impotence which leaves one buffeted by the forces of nature. Rejecting 'deliberate' or 'reasonable' transcripts, Bernard calls for 'a painful, guttural, visceral, also soaring, lark-like, pealing song'(177), yet the text cannot so readily hold these two moments - guttural and lark-like - of its Utopian ideal together. To enter the semiotic realm of dreams, 'unborn selves' or 'old, half-articulated ghosts' is

simultaneously to unleash a threateningly pre-human self: 'the old brute...the savage, the hairy man who dabbles his fingers in ropes of entrails; and gobbles and belches; whose speech is guttural, visceral'(205). Alert to the dangers of primitivism, the novel halts before giving free rein to this Darwinian savage, this 'illimitable chaos' within the self.<sup>30</sup> The novel needs to dissolve the rigid, premature totalities of patriarchal 'consecutive sentences', yet without abolishing the project of totality altogether; it both desires and fears the 'bark, a groan'(178) which seems to it the only possible alternative to the suave schematizations of the symbolic order. Bernard at last finds it impossible to live 'without a self, weightless and visionless... without illusion'(202-203). His final soliloquy is increasingly pessimistic as it contemplates the disastrous consequences of a collapse of the thetic self that had initially been desired.

The extreme enactment of the negative aspects of rejecting the symbolic and the thetic are seen in Rhoda, who suffers a dispersal of the self of pathological proportions, from which even self-inflicted pain-banging her hand 'against some hard door'(31) - cannot recall her. Excluded from the thetic domain of propositions and positionality, Rhoda exists (if that is indeed the right word for her tenuous mode of being!) only in the 'margin' of the symbolic order, in the chasms in the continuity of its ways: 'How you snatched me from the white spaces that lie between hour and hour and rolled them into dirty pellets and tossed them into the waste-paper with your greasy paws. Yet those were my life'(145). Associated with whiteness(13,46,77) and emptiness(16,99) outside time and logic, Rhoda marks out the locus of a feminine space, that non-symbolizable Other that must be repressed but none the less exist for a normative discourse to be installed. Such a 'discourse' is not organized around the self-present centre - Derrida's transcendental signifier - that sustains masculine meaning and order; it is infinitely



decentred. Yet Bernard finds language impossible without a self and Rhoda psychotically sinks under the waves and is dissolved. A feminine discourse of the white spaces is thus strictly a contradiction, impossible except as silence, for those white spaces have, precisely, to be repressed in order for discourse to be possible.

Feminine writing would thus put into discursive circulation that which normative writing represses, the realm outside the Cartesian subject. In 'On Being Ill' Woolf draws attention to just such a realm. As the body asserts itself in the state of illness, so language suddenly reveals its normally repressed materiality: 'In health meaning has encroached upon sound. Our intelligence dominates over our senses. But in illness, with the police off duty, we creep beneath some obscure poem by Mallarmé or Donne...and the words give out their scent and distil their flavour, and then, if at last we grasp the meaning, it is all the richer for having come to us sensually first, by way of the palate and the nostrils, like some queer odour'(CE, 4:200). The self is pluralized; there return 'embryo lives which attend us in early youth until "I" suppressed them'. With responsibility and reason in abeyance, we become 'sudden, fitful, intense'(199); the sick are 'outlaws', escaped from 'paternal government'(200). Illness thus releases the characteristics of the submarine realm that Bernard visits, the feminine that is repressed as disruptive by patriarchal law. Liberated into a rich polyvalence, this realm is always in Woolf simultaneously menacing because it is near to, or even simply is, a Nature that nullifies all human values into chaos. Elvedon will always be a 'hostile country'(12) from which Bernard and Susan must escape, as well as a Utopia.

A difficult poise must be effected, since feminine writing must be inside language enough not to succumb to nature, but also outside it in the sense of dissolving its reified unities. For as Woolf phrases it in A Room of One's Own, it is fatal to be either a man or woman pure and simple(RO, 157). In the early stages of working on The Waves, she had

planned to use 'a man and a woman' talking as the narrative consciousness, and even if the man was later to be left 'absolutely dim'(WD,108), his existence was still necessary, just as in Elvedon there must be gardeners who tend Nature as a counterpart to the woman writing. It is, appropriately, the androgynous Bernard, who possesses 'the logical sobriety of a man' 'joined to the sensibility of a woman'(55), who discovers Elvedon. It is also Bernard who absorbs the consciousnesses of the five characters and even at last takes the place of the narrative consciousness itself, in which the whole discourse - interludes and monologues - had taken place. 'Day rises; the girl lifts the watery fire-hearted jewels to her brow; the sun levels his beams straight at the sleeping house'(207). Bernard's own discourse thus subsumes the interludes themselves, and he in a sense becomes identified with the woman writing in Elvedon.

Androgyny is necessary for the feminine discourse to be heard at all. If it is 'feminine' pure and simple, there will be only silence, a 'white space' that will be tossed into the wastepaper basket (145). To make such white space conspicuous, to make silence heard, the letter and the voice are necessary, even though at the very same moment they threaten to quell what they enable. Feminine writing will appear as 'white spaces between hours', as emptiness and lack between syntax and logic, disturbing the linearity of the paternal order. Lest a female discourse should collapse into eternal silence, there must be, in Kristeva's words, 'a constant alternation between time and its "truth", identity and its loss, history and the timeless, signless, extra-phenomenal things that produce it. An impossible dialectic: a permanent alternation: never <sup>the</sup> one without the other'.<sup>31</sup> The condition of possibility of feminine writing can only be this alternation between the formation of thethetic subject and a regression to the pre-Oedipal stage, to the jouissance of an as yet undissociated mother and child.



Androgynous as he is, Bernard lives precisely this endless oscillation between the formation and dissolution of the self: 'Having dropped off satisfied like a child from the breast, I am at liberty now to sink down, deep, into what passes, this omnipresent, general life'(81). As the regressive image of contented suckling suggests, Bernard 'sinks down' to 'the profound depths'(81) of the Imaginary in which there is no solidity, no distinction, no time but dreams: 'the passage of undifferentiated faces...drugs me into dreams; rubs the features from faces. People might walk through me. And, what is this moment of time, this particular day in which I have found myself caught?'(81). 'Unmoored...from a private being', Bernard retrieves the Imaginary identification with the whole world: 'to embrace the whole world with the arms of understanding', 'I am not, at this moment, myself'(82). Then, in the next stage of the dialectic, he gropes his way out from the Imaginary, separating himself as subject from the world of objects, taking up a position asthetic subject: 'It steals in through some crack in the structure - one's identity. I am not part of the street - no, I observe the street. One splits off, therefore'(82). He resumes his command over language, generating one story after another; thus he 'elaborates' or 'differentiates' himself(83).

Bernard's oscillation never comes to an end - 'one moment free; the next, this'(207) - for it is the very process of androgyny. But this dialectic is charged with ambivalence, and a final value can never be assigned to either of its phases. Under one aspect, dissolution of the self is liberation from the limits of personal identity, freedom from 'false phrases'. In this stage Bernard expands in phantasy, 'so vast, a temple, a church, a whole universe, unconfined and capable of being everywhere on the verge of things'(207). Emerging from the 'thick leaves of habit'(201), he attains a radical Keatsian negative capability ('Immeasurably receptive'(206)), from which perspective language is necessarily partial and false: 'I need a little language such as lovers

use, words of one syllable such as children speak when they come into the room and find their mother sewing and pick up some scrap of bright wool, a feather, or a shred of chintz'(209). Once again the image of ontological security (which is the precondition, however, of the blurring of the borders of self) in the presence of the mother testifies to the retrieval of the Imaginary. Bernard wonders whether inability to recover from 'dissipation', 'endless throwing away', from becoming an 'immeasurable sea'(201), is 'a sort of death' or, positively, 'A new assembly of elements'(198). For dissolution may also be a foundering and sinking, threatening one with 'becom[ing] part of that unfeeling universe'(199), which is Rhoda's unenviable fate. It is potentially the defeat of humanity by 'the sea; the insensitive nature'(WD, 153). His ambivalence towards this dialectic of the self and its dissipation can be seen in his simultaneously thanking and cursing the other who forces him to re-collect his self from its dispersal: 'how also under your gaze...I begin to perceive this, that and the other...there is a gradual coming together, running into one, acceleration and unification'(208); 'Curse you then...I must haul myself up...must push my arms into the sleeves...tired as I am, spent as I am'(210). The image of pushing arms into sleeves is in part the reassumption of daily routine, but perhaps also suggests, as a gesture of penetration (weary though it may be), a return to the phallic position and self-possession which underpins such routines. For Bernard, 'must, must, must' are 'merciful words', for though 'we pretend to revile', without them 'we should be undone'(166). Thus he must perforce undergo 'the eternal renewal' of selfhood, a permanent alternation between the formation and the dissemination of the self: 'the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again'(211). This dangerous, impossible dialectic is the existential reality of androgyny. The rhythm of the sea as a metaphor of the semiotic chora - its patterns and pulses of one/two, in/out, rise/fall - cuts across the syntax of



sentence and plot throughout the text, yet without dissolving them completely, and only in this form can the 'impossible', endless alternation realize itself.

How indeed is it possible to actualize a feminine writing that is not organized around the phallogentric identity and positionality, but would none the less - centreless though it is - not be lost in silence? How, in the terms of Woolf's imagery, deviate from the 'straight lines' of the Roman roads into 'the brambles and thick tree trunks into the heart of the forest'(CE, 4:165), and yet not simply abandon oneself to a valueless nature or flux. The struggle to preserve both these moments or modes of being constitutes Bernard's 'perpetual warfare, it is the shattering and piecing together'(191).<sup>32</sup> Reassembling the scattered jigsaw of identity, Bernard asserts himself against 'the stupidity of nature'(191), once more challenges 'the immeasurable sea'. The ambivalences and oscillation I have traced throughout this study recur in Woolf's own comments on the ending of the novel. On the one hand, she aims 'to show that the theme effort, effort, dominates: not the waves: and personality: and defiance'. But, on the other hand, she at once falls into doubt, almost immediately recants: 'but I am not sure of the effect artistically; because the proportions may need the intervention of the waves finally so as to make a conclusion'(WD, 162). And the waves, which are both a Darwinian 'insensitive nature'(WD, 153) and a warm, fecund bath of semiotic energies, a kind of primordial maternal body, of course do complete the novel. The waves are, thematically, the dissolution of human order, which has both its negative and positive (feminist) aspects, but formally the affirmation of an authorial will that seeks to round the multifarious materials of its novel into a satisfying totality. 'The waves broke on the shore'(211), thus sustaining the impossible dialectic of an androgynous feminine writing, of the dissemination and integration of the self, to the very last.

## NOTES

(Full details of publication are given in the Bibliography)

### PREFACE

- <sup>1</sup> For Leonard's interest in Freud see Quentin Bell, Virginia Woolf: A Biography, p. 19, footnote 2. For Woolf herself see A Writer's Diary edited by Leonard Woolf, pp. 321-322, 326-327, and Virginia Woolf's Reading Notebooks edited by Brenda R. Silver, p.45 and pp. 111-117.
- <sup>2</sup> Elaine Showalter, A Literature of their Own, Chapter X 'Virginia Woolf and the Flight into Androgyny', and Sydney Jane Kaplan, Feminine Consciousness in the Modern British Novel, Chapter III 'Virginia Woolf'.
- <sup>3</sup> Herbert Marder, Feminism and Art, p.2.
- <sup>4</sup> See "'No more horses": Virginia Woolf on art and propaganda', Women's Studies 4, no.2/3, 1977, 265-90; and B.Carroll, "'To crush him in our own country": the political thought of Virginia Woolf', Feminist Studies 4 no.1(1978), 99-129. Jane Marcus has also edited two collections of criticism on Woolf: New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf (1981) and Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Slant (1983).
- <sup>5</sup> Woolf, Contemporary Writers, p.124 and Collected Essays, 2: 145.

### CHAPTER I

- <sup>1</sup> 'Modern Novels' was published in The Times Literary Supplement on 10th April 1919, and reprinted slightly revised in The Common Reader (1925) as 'Modern Fiction', the version which is now generally known. The revision involves only slight changes of phrasing, the only major difference being that the famous remark that 'life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged' does not appear in the first version. I will therefore use 'Modern Fiction' as my text, but will treat it as written in 1919 in my discussion.
- <sup>2</sup> See Virginia Woolf's Reading Notebooks edited by Brenda R. Silver, pp. 18-19.
- <sup>3</sup> R. Brimley Johnson, Some Contemporary Novelists (Women), pp. xiv-xv.
- <sup>4</sup> Elaine Showalter, A Literature of their Own, p.242.
- <sup>5</sup> Dorothy Richardson, Pilgrimage 1, p.9.
- <sup>6</sup> See his Men Without Art, pp.158-171.
- <sup>7</sup> David Lodge, The Modes of Modern Writing, p.177.
- <sup>8</sup> Dorothy Richardson, Pilgrimage 2, p.210.
- <sup>9</sup> The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume II, Appendix III: 'The Intellectual Status of Women', pp.339-342.
- <sup>10</sup> Nineteenth-century women novelists used male pseudonyms in order to receive unbiased critical attention from their male colleagues. Charlotte Bronte, for example, wrote despairingly to her publisher's editor that she wished to be regarded as a novelist simply, not as a woman novelist.



Even in the twentieth century women novelists remain, precisely, 'women' novelists. This is not an acknowledgement of difference; women novelists are seen rather as a deviation from or a sub-class of the great (male) tradition. Woolf's *Diary* contains many entries which refer irritably to journalists always mentioning her as a 'woman writer'.

<sup>11</sup> For Dorothy Richardson it was H.G.Wells who was the quintessential male writer, in opposition to whom she had to define her artistic identity. Elaine Showalter notes that 'the Wells affair was a major event, both in personal and artistic terms'; when she announced her novel as an effort 'to produce a feminine equivalent of the current masculine realism', 'it was chiefly Wells's realism she had in mind'. Though she was almost of the same age as Wells, Richardson, as a late-starter, belongs rather to the Georgian literary generation. For her, as for Woolf, generational conflict and gender differences are interlinked. To both writers 'the Edwardian novel of external realism and accumulated detail' represented 'a male literary culture'. Showalter, p.253.

<sup>12</sup> Woolf, Women and Writing, introduced by Michèle Barrett, p.67.

<sup>13</sup> 'The Intellectual Status of Women', The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume II, p.342.

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Heath, The Sexual Fix, pp.141-142.

<sup>15</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Oscillation between Power and Denial' in New French Feminisms, edited by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, p.165.

<sup>16</sup> Mary Jacobus, 'The Difference of View' in Women Writing and Writing about Women, edited by Mary Jacobus, p.20.

<sup>17</sup> Helene Cixous, 'Castration or Decapitation', Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, vol. 7, no.1, 1981, p.54, and 'The Laugh of the Medusa' in Marks and de Courtivron (eds.), p.254.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Heath, 'Difference', Screen, vol. 19, no. 3, Autumn 1978, pp.77-78.

<sup>19</sup> Heath, The Sexual Fix, p.118.

<sup>20</sup> Woolf, The Pargiters, edited by Mitchell A. Leaska, p.xxxiii.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.xxxiii.

<sup>22</sup> Showalter, pp. 289, 296, 318, 291.

<sup>23</sup> Georg Lukács, The Meaning of Contemporary Realism, translated by John and Necke Mander, pp.26, 46.

<sup>24</sup> Showalter, p.296.

<sup>25</sup> Gillian Beer, 'Beyond Determinism: George Eliot and Virginia Woolf' in Jacobus (ed.), p.90.

<sup>26</sup> This psychoanalytic account of the emergence of the subject is based on a fundamentally masculine model, and has come under strong criticism from feminist theoreticians. Psychoanalytic theories of the female subject and of female sexuality have been offered by female analysts like Irigaray, Chodorow, Chasseguet-Smirgel. These emphasize the crucial significance of

the daughter's attachment to the mother, which Freud initially recognized but failed to explore adequately.

<sup>27</sup> Cixous, 'Castration or Decapitation', p.54. Cixous's view is related to the theories of Julia Kristeva, which I discuss below, though Kristeva is associated more closely than Cixous with Lacanian psychoanalysis.

<sup>28</sup> Heath, The Sexual Fix, p.135.

<sup>29</sup> In this context, Elaine Showalter is right in claiming that 'it is the hardest of all to prove that there are inherent sexual qualities to prose apart from its content, which was the crucial point Richardson wished to make'. Showalter, p.258.

<sup>30</sup> May Sinclair, 'The Novels of Dorothy Richardson', The Little Review, vol. 4, no. 12, April 1918, p.6.

<sup>31</sup> For 'liquid flow', see the account of as yet untranslated work by Luce Irigaray in Jane Gallop, Feminism and Psychoanalysis, pp. 39, 42. For 'white ink' or 'milk', see Cixous 'Laugh of the Medusa', p. 251.

<sup>32</sup> Beer, 'Beyond Determinism', pp. 95-96. See also her discussion of this issue in Virginia Woolf: A Centenary Perspective, edited by Eric Warner, p.107.

<sup>33</sup> Julia Kristeva, Revolution in Poetic Language, p.17. This book is hereafter referred to in my text as RPL.

<sup>34</sup> Kristeva, cited in Sherry Turkle, Psychoanalytic Politics: Freud's French Revolution, p.82.

<sup>35</sup> Allon White, 'Exposition and Critique of Julia Kristeva', Stencilled Occasional Paper, CCCS, The University of Birmingham, pp.16, 17.

<sup>36</sup> Luce Irigaray, 'This Sex Which Is Not One' in Marks and de Courtivron (eds.), p.100. Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', p.245.

<sup>37</sup> Kristeva, 'Woman Can Never Be Defined' in Marks and de Courtivron (eds.), pp.137-138.

<sup>38</sup> Kristeva, 'Oscillation between Power and Denial', p.166, and see her About Chinese Women, p.39.

## CHAPTER II

<sup>1</sup> For an exposition of this difficult concept see Anika Lemaire, Jacques Lacan, p.41.

<sup>2</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Lecture', translated by Richard Howard, Oxford Literary Review, vol. 4, no. 1, Autumn 1979, p36.

<sup>3</sup> According to Lemaire, Lacan views 'knowledge' as 'not a term of truth'. 'Ultimately, it is always in the heart of discourse that knowledge slides, because it is precisely within the cracks in discourse that it is inscribed. Knowledge is that which denounces error and the mistakes made in the agreed usage of the signs of language. A term which is more efficient, more fruitful and which produces a better result at the level of practice is a term of knowledge'. Lemaire, p.114. This comment has a general bearing on these experimental works of Woolf's.

<sup>4</sup> Lodge, p.183.



<sup>5</sup> Hermione Lee, The Novels of Virginia Woolf, pp.81, 83.

<sup>6</sup> Paul de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' in his Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism (Second Edition), pp. 192, 189, 192.

<sup>7</sup> Frank Lentricchia, After the New Criticism, p.6. See also Walter Benjamin's account of the symbol as 'a usurper who came to power in the chaos which followed in the wake of romanticism' in his The Origin of German Tragic Drama, translated by John Osborne, p.159ff.

<sup>8</sup> Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, p.12.

<sup>9</sup> See the entry in Martin Pegler, The Dictionary of Interior Design. The technical term for the motif is 'aegicram' or 'aegicranes'.

<sup>10</sup> Derrida, p.11.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.136.

<sup>12</sup> From Hegel's Lectures on Aesthetics, cited in Mowbray Allan, T.S. Eliot's Impersonal Theory of Poetry, pp.25-26.

<sup>13</sup> T.S. Eliot, Selected Essays, p.145.

<sup>14</sup> Lentricchia, p.6.

<sup>15</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'London Letter', The Dial 71 (August 1921), pp.216-217.

<sup>16</sup> Terry Eagleton, summarizing Benjamin's argument, in Walter Benjamin: Or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism, p.4.

<sup>17</sup> F.R. Leavis, 'Shelley', Revaluation, pp.193-194.

<sup>18</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Differance', Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs, p.143.

<sup>19</sup> For Benjamin's account of the 'aura', see his Illuminations, edited by Hannah Arendt, pp.190, 223ff.

<sup>20</sup> In CE, 2: 167 she notes that nineteenth-century 'conditions' 'lasted, roughly speaking, till the year 1914'. See also her claim that 'the war withered a generation before its time' in 'New Novels', Times Literary Supplement, June 17 1920, cited in Jane Marcus, 'Art and Anger', Feminist Studies, vol. 4, no. 1, February 1978, p.96.

<sup>21</sup> Fredric Jameson, 'Walter Benjamin; or, Nostalgia', Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature, p. 72.

<sup>22</sup> See Yeats, A Vision and T.S. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets' in Selected Essays; also Frank Kermode's powerful critique of such dissociation theories in Romantic Image, pp.153-177. See below p.256 for a reflection on Woolf's relationship as a specifically female writer to such theories.

<sup>23</sup> Derrida, Of Grammatology, pp.39-40.

<sup>24</sup> In The Voyage Out Rachel's deathsoon after exploring a South American wilderness also suggests the precariousness of the human in the face of a meaningless nature. Gillian Beer demonstrates a close affinity between the description of the jungle in the novel and a passage from Darwin's The Voyage of the Beagle and offers a full discussion of the implications

of Darwin's work for Woolf in her 'Virginia Woolf and Pre-History' in Warner (ed.), pp.99-123.

<sup>25</sup> See my discussion of the relation of Lily Briscoe to such aesthetic 'minimalism', p.159 below.

<sup>26</sup> Paul Fussell, The Great War and Modern Memory, p.230.

<sup>27</sup> Socially marginalized and in love with Jacob who enjoys the cultural resources of the capital, Clara has certain resemblances to Walter Pater's female narrator in the first of his Imaginary Portraits, 'A Prince of Court Painters'. Perry Meisel suggests that this was 'the first of the sketches - and probably the very first Pater Virginia was to read' and that the narrator's 'situation bears a striking resemblance to the one in which Virginia herself was now embroiled', The Absent Father: Virginia Woolf and Walter Pater, p.13.

<sup>28</sup> 'Phallogocentric' combines the concepts 'phallogocentrism' and 'logocentrism'. The latter refers to the dominance of the logos (word) in reason and conceptualization of the world, and the former to the privileged place accorded to the phallus in language, psychoanalysis, and Western thought generally. Condensed together, they name the fundamental principle of Western rationality.

<sup>29</sup> Lee, pp.74-76.

<sup>30</sup> Roland Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, p.32.

### CHAPTER III

<sup>1</sup> QB, 2: 106 and L, III: 136.

<sup>2</sup> See Otto Jespersen, The Philosophy of Grammar, pp.291-292.

<sup>3</sup> David Daiches argues that 'for' is 'a word which does not indicate a strict logical sequence, at least not in its popular usage, but does suggest a relationship which is at least half-logical', Virginia Woolf, p.72.

<sup>4</sup> Erich Auerbach, 'The Brown Stocking', Mimesis: the Representation of Reality in Western Literature, translated by Willard R. Trask, p.532.

<sup>5</sup> J. Hillis Miller, 'Virginia Woolf's All Souls' Day: The Omniscient Narrator in Mrs. Dalloway' in The Shaken Realist: Essays in Modern Literature in Honour of F.J. Hoffman, edited by Melvin Friedman and John B. Vickery, pp. 100-127

<sup>6</sup> 'After "To the Lighthouse"' in A Selection from Scrutiny,<sup>2</sup> edited by F.R. Leavis, pp.97-100.

<sup>7</sup> From J.F.Holms's review of Mrs. Dalloway, reprinted in Towards Standards of Criticism: Selections from The Calendar of Modern Letters, chosen by F.R. Leavis, p. 49.

<sup>8</sup> Kristeva, 'Oscillation between Power and Denial', p.166.

<sup>9</sup> Woolf, 'Street Haunting', CE, 4:161.

<sup>10</sup> Phyllis Rose, Woman of Letters: A Life of Virginia Woolf, p.125.



- 11 Commenting upon the novel in a letter to Janet Case, Woolf emphasized precisely this unity of form and content: '...how can you accuse me of believing that [the way things are written matters and not the things]? I don't believe you can possibly separate expression from thought in an imaginative work' (L, III: 201).
- 12 Josette Féral writes ' [woman] is outside any principle of identity-to-self, but she can identify with several scenes without really integrating herself into them', 'Antigone or the Irony of the Tribe', Diacritics, Fall 1978, p.6.
- 13 Meisel, p.181.
- 14 Ibid., p.182.
- 15 To Ethel Smyth Woolf wrote: 'how can you imagine how much sexual feeling has to do with an emotion for one's mother!' Cited by Jane Marcus in her 'Thinking Back through Our Mothers' in New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf, p.14.
- 16 Juliet Mitchell, Psychoanalysis and Feminism, p.116.
- 17 The Shelley quotation is in 'Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street' in Mrs. Dalloway's Party: A Short Story Sequence by Virginia Woolf, edited by Stella McNichol, p.22. In this short piece, from which the novel developed, the theme of losing integrity and purity as one grows is more explicit.
- 18 Julia Kristeva, Polylogue, p.79, cited in Féral, 'Antigone or the Irony of the Tribe', p.12.
- 19 In so far as the bond with another woman is cancelled by the necessity of serving male desire, this instance repeats the earlier incident in which Clarissa's sisterly feeling towards Whitbread's wife is undermined by a coquettish consciousness of herself as woman. In puberty Clarissa had had 'a presentiment' that the pure love, the special bond, between women could not last (35).
- 20 Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway's Party, p.19.
- 21 I use the phrase in the generalized, non-psychoanalytic sense indicated by Laplanche and Pontalis: 'it should be pointed out that this expression is often employed in a loose way as a description of a woman with allegedly masculine character-traits - e.g. authoritarianism - even when it is not known what the underlying phantasies are'. J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, The Language of Psycho-Analysis, p.312.
- 22 Raymond Williams, 'The Bloomsbury Fraction', Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays, p.156.
- 23 Charles Baudelaire, 'Correspondances', Selected Poems, translated by Joanna Richardson, p.42.
- 24 The intense beauty and joy of a life separated from 'humanity' is shared by Clarissa. Her intense feelings among the flowers and trees is contrasted with Walsh's sarcastic remark, 'Musing among the vegetables?' (5). It is both Peter's strength and ultimate limitation that he prefers people.
- 25 The French term jouissance carries a wide range of meaning: enjoyment in the sense of legal or social possession, pleasure, and the pleasure of sexual climax. Lacan uses the word especially emphasizing the totality of enjoyment covered by it - simultaneously sexual, spiritual, physical,

conceptual. Kristeva similarly uses the word to denote a total joy, which 'also, through the working of the signifier...implies the presence of meaning (jouissance = j'ouis sens = I heard meaning), requiring it by going beyond'. Editor's Introduction to Julia Kristeva, Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art, edited by Leon S. Roudiez, p.16. In Kristeva's work, purely sensual or sexual pleasure is covered by the term plaisir.

<sup>26</sup> See the Preface to the First Edition of Mrs. Dalloway. In a letter Woolf wrote 'Septimus and Mrs. Dalloway should be entirely dependent upon each other' (L, III: 189).

<sup>27</sup> In the novel, 'life' and 'death' do not have one fixed value; they constantly interchange positive and negative signs. Septimus's suicide is positive, while the 'life' which the doctors uphold is corruption and lies; but elsewhere 'life' is joy and pleasure and death their negation.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, WD, pp.57, 59, 60, 62.

#### CHAPTER IV

<sup>1</sup> Lodge, p.177.

<sup>2</sup> Roland Barthes, S/Z, translated by Richard Miller, p.160.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Culler, 'Jacques Derrida' in Structuralism and Since: From Levi-Strauss to Derrida, edited by John Sturrock, p.178.

<sup>4</sup> See Harold Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry.

<sup>5</sup> John Mepham, 'Figures of desire: narration and fiction in To the Lighthouse', in The Modern English Novel: the reader, the writer and the work, edited by Gabriel Josipovici, p.174.

<sup>6</sup> Sigmund Freud, New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, translated by James Strachey, p.115. See also Gallop, p.65.

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Derrida, Positions, translated by Alan Bass, p.41.

<sup>8</sup> See Lemaire, p.87.

<sup>9</sup> See Jacques Derrida, 'The White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy', New Literary History, vol. VI, no. 1 (1974), pp.7-74.

<sup>10</sup> Luce Irigaray, 'This Sex Which Is Not One', in Marks and de Courtivron (eds.), p.100-101.

<sup>11</sup> Derrida, Of Grammatology, p.12.

<sup>12</sup> Woolf, Three Guineas, pp.107, 121.

<sup>13</sup> Derrida, Of Grammatology, p.147.

<sup>14</sup> Irigaray, 'This Sex...', p.104.

<sup>15</sup> See Hanna Segal, Klein, p.66.

<sup>16</sup> Claude Levi-Strauss, 'The Structural Study of Myth', Structural Anthropology, translated by Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf, p.215.

<sup>17</sup> For T.S. Eliot on this 'expressive figure of the lower class', see 'Marie Lloyd' in Selected Essays, pp.456-459.



- 18 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Unmaking and Making in To the Lighthouse' in Women and Language in Literature and Society, edited by Sally McConnell-Ginet, Ruth Baker and Nelly Furman, pp.310-311.
- 19 See Eliot, Selected Essays, p.283.
- 20 On these two metaphors in critical theory, see M.H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and Critical Tradition, especially Chapters Two and Three.
- 21 See the account in Gallop, Chapters Three and Six.
- 22 Irigaray, 'This Sex...', pp.104-105.
- 23 Auerbach, p.532.
- 24 Gallop, p.121.
- 25 Ibid., p.121.
- 26 Carmichael is perhaps a poet of the sort that Wilfred Owen was attacking. He published 'a volume of poems...which had an unexpected success. The war, people said, had revived their interest in poetry'(208).
- 27 T.E. Hulme, 'Romanticism and Classicism', Speculations, edited by Herbert Read, p.134.
- 28 It is more common to associate the phallic with the Father. However, the notion of the 'woman with a penis' can be seen even in Freud's early article 'On the Sexual Theories of Children'(1908); Melanie Klein developed this concept, proposing a totally different genesis for it. Julia Kristeva also emphasizes 'the phallic' of the mother in Polylogue. See the entries under 'Phallic Woman', 'Phallic Mother', 'Combined Parent(s)', 'Combined Parent-Figure', in Laplanche and Pontalis, The Language of Psycho-Analysis.
- 29 Gallop, p.115.
- 30 Kristeva, Polylogue, p.204, cited in Gallop, p.117.
- 31 Jacques Lacan, Écrits, translated by Alan Sheridan, p.288.
- 32 On the issue of an unworked grief in Woolf herself which Lily solves vicariously, see Mark Spilka, 'Lily Briscoe's Borrowed Grief', Virginia Woolf's Quarrel with Grieving, pp.75-109.
- 33 Gallop, p.114 (Note 1), p.115. On this 'structural weakness' see also Nancy Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering and Dorothy Dinnerstein, The Mermaid and the Minotaur.
- 34 Lemaire, p.86.
- 35 In 1939 Woolf wrote : 'until I was in the forties...the presence of my mother ob<sup>o</sup>ssessed me. I could hear her voice, see her, imagine what she would do or say as I went about my day's doings. She was one of the invisible presences who after all play so important a part in every life' (MB, 80). To lose this presence is to be both desolatingly alone and yet free at last, and this is an ambivalence also characteristic of Woolf's response to the war, which is a tragic loss of full meaning, but also overthrows the intimidating parents. It thus affords a chink of freedom where one can seek an autonomy of one's own. See above pp.61-62.

<sup>36</sup> In her diary Woolf notes that, in the last section, 'the problem is how to bring Lily and Mr. R. together and make a combination of interest at the end...so that one had the sense of reading the two things at the same time?' (WD, 99).

## CHAPTER V

<sup>1</sup> 'L. has just been in to consult about a 3rd edition of Orlando. This has been ordered; we have sold over 6,000 copies...Anyhow my room is secure' (WD, 139-140).

<sup>2</sup> J.J. Wilson, 'Why is Orlando difficult?' in New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf, edited by Jane Marcus, pp.170-184. Jean Guignet declares that 'only the person to whom it was dedicated...Vita Sackville-West - can solve the riddle of it', Virginia Woolf and her Works, p.170.

<sup>3</sup> Hermione Lee, The Novels of Virginia Woolf, p.138.

<sup>4</sup> Nicholson is cited in Rose, p.180. Lee, p.138,

<sup>5</sup> See WD, 102.

<sup>6</sup> Guignet, p.261.

<sup>7</sup> With the recent stress on the excavation of Woolf's personal life, especially in American feminist criticism, this kind of biographical approach seems to be flourishing still more.

<sup>8</sup> See Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious, translated by James Strachey.

<sup>9</sup> These words admittedly bolster the case of those critics who omit Orlando and trace a continuity from To the Lighthouse to The Waves.

<sup>10</sup> Maria DiBattista, Virginia Woolf's Major Novels: The Fables of Anon, p.115.

<sup>11</sup> Rosemary Jackson, Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion, p.3.

<sup>12</sup> Apart from reviews of contemporary women writers, Woolf published, together with E.M. Forster, letters of protest against the banning of Radclyffe Hall's The Well of Loneliness, articles on Lady Strachey, women and fiction, Mary Wollstonecraft, Dorothy Wordsworth, Fanny Burney's half-sister, Aurora Leigh and an account of a Working Women's Guild. These were all published between 1927 and 1931.

<sup>13</sup> Showalter, p.282.

<sup>14</sup> Jackson, p.41.

<sup>15</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre, translated by Richard Howard, especially Chapter 4.

<sup>16</sup> The fantastic is also adopted by Woolf to justify an incompatible combination of 'truth of fact and truth of fiction' (CE, 4:234), which is necessary for any biographer, but which necessarily fails, as she reflects in 'The New Biography', an essay written at the same time as Orlando. For Orlando is subtitled 'A Biography' and even has an index. A 'joke' or 'farce' is the only solution Woolf can offer for the 'queer amalgamation of dream and reality', the 'marriage of granite and rainbow' (CE, 4: 235), which, as she notes in the essay, remains to be discovered.



In another biography, Flush, Woolf again resorts to a fantastic device and uses a dog as mediator of this awkward amalgamation of fact and fiction.

<sup>17</sup> Showalter, p.264.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.289.

<sup>19</sup> Mary Jacobus, 'The Difference of View', in Jacobus (ed.), p.20.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.20.

<sup>21</sup> Kristeva, About Chinese Women, p.38.

<sup>22</sup> Nancy Topping Bazin, Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision, p.132.

<sup>23</sup> Jackson, p.42.

<sup>24</sup> Cited in Cora Kaplan, 'Language and Gender', in Papers on Patriarchy, p.36. Kaplan remarks: 'metonymy is a dominant trope in women's poetry, since it is a way of referring to experience suppressed in public discourse'.

<sup>25</sup> Jackson, p.16. See also Kristeva on Bakhtin, 'Word, Dialogue and Novel', Desire in Language, pp.64-91.

<sup>26</sup> The novel's choice of Constantinople perhaps pertains to the discourse of Otherness that Edward Said terms 'Orientalism'. See his Orientalism.

<sup>27</sup> Jackson, p.48.

<sup>28</sup> Heath, 'Difference', pp.65-66.

<sup>29</sup> Eagleton, Walter Benjamin, p.138.

<sup>30</sup> DiBattista, The Fables of Anon, p.120.

<sup>31</sup> Kristeva, Chinese Women, p.38.

<sup>32</sup> Jackson, p.20.

<sup>33</sup> Todorov, p.33.

<sup>34</sup> Jackson, p.82.

<sup>35</sup> Freud's question is cited in E. Jones, Sigmund Freud: Life and Work, Volume 2, p.468. Jacques Lacan repeats it in 'God and the Jouissance of The Woman. A Love Letter', in Feminine Sexuality, edited by Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, p.146.

<sup>36</sup> 'In both Encore and Television Lacan repeatedly asserts that "woman does not exist"', Gallop, p.34.

<sup>37</sup> Kristeva, RPL, p.79.

<sup>38</sup> Kristeva, Chinese Women, p.79.

<sup>39</sup> See Lemaire, Part Three, pp.65-92.

<sup>40</sup> Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, and 'Death Instincts' and 'Pair of Opposites' in Laplanche and Pontalis, pp.97-103 and 295.

- 41 Kristeva, RPL, p.23.
- 42 Kristeva, Chinese Women, p.34.
- 43 Ibid., p.36.
- 44 Jameson, Marxism and Form, p.374, and The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act, p.136.
- 45 TL, 276. See above p. 161.
- 46 Cited in QB, 2: 118.
- 47 See Rose, Woman of Letters, especially Chapter Eight.
- 48 Woolf makes the fictitious present of the book and the actual historical date coincide, doubtless as part of the joke. 11th October, 1928 is the day when a copy of Orlando was sent to Vita Sackville-West. See Vita's letter to her husband, reprinted in Twentieth Century Literature: Virginia Woolf Issue, vol. 25, no. 3/4, Fall/Winter 1979, p.348.
- 49 John Graham, 'The "Caricature Value" of Parody and Fantasy in Orlando', in Virginia Woolf: A Collection of Critical Essays, edited by Claire Sprague, p.114.
- 50 Jacobus, 'The Difference of View', in Jacobus (ed.), p.19.
- 51 Graham, 'The "Caricature Value" of Parody and Fantasy in Orlando', p.113.
- 52 Jackson, p.82.
- 53 See Roland Barthes, Writing Degree Zero, pp.30-31.
- 54 Manuscript of Orlando, reprinted in Twentieth Century Literature: Virginia Woolf Issue, p.316.
- 55 Ibid., p.342, note 17.
- 56 Raymond Williams, The Country and the City, p.290.
- 57 Kristeva, Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection, translated by Leon S. Roudiez, especially Chapters One to Three.

## CHAPTER VI

- <sup>1</sup> She writes: 'the difficulty of digging oneself in there, with conviction ...I press to my centre...I could perhaps do B's soliloquy in such a way as to break up, dig deep...that very condensed book The Waves...I think The Waves is anyhow tense and packed'(WD, 149, 151, 165, 171, 174).
- <sup>2</sup> Lee, p.160.
- <sup>3</sup> Guiguet, p.286.
- <sup>4</sup> Lee, p.163.
- <sup>5</sup> Melvin Friedman, cited in Lee, p.160.
- <sup>6</sup> See Roy Pascal, The Dual Voice: Free Indirect Speech and its functioning in the nineteenth-century European Novel, Part I; also see above pp. 75-76, and 79.



- 7 Woolf notes in her diary that the book to be called an autobiography (WD, 143).
- 8 Compare the evocation of 'the waves breaking, one, two, one, two', which Woolf describes as 'the most important of all my memories', in 'A Sketch of the Past' (MB, 64).
- 9 See Kristeva, RPL, pp. 63, 69, 62; Chinese Women, p.38.
- 10 For an account of Louis as 'proto-fascist', see Sarah Ruddick, 'Private Brother, Public World', in Marcus, New Feminist Essays, pp.205-6.
- 11 Coppelia Kahn reveals a parallel defensive rejection and then struggle and interaction with the feminine element in King Lear. 'Excavating "Those Dim Ninoan Regions": Maternal Subtexts in Patriarchal Literature', Diacritics, Summer 1982, pp.32-41.
- 12 Ruddick, 'Private Brother, Public World', p.206.
- 13 See Kristeva, Powers of Horror and p.227 above.
- 14 Kristeva, Chinese Women, p.34.
- 15 Ibid., p.35.
- 16 Woolf, A Voyage Out, p.262. Dorothy Richardson, who also suspects (male) language of petrifying the real by defining and classifying it, similarly seeks to give expression to 'the reality that fell, all the time, in the surrounding silence'. Miriam reflects that 'anything that can be put into propositions is suspect', thus questioning the thetic position of language. Pilgrimage, Volume III, p.360, Volume IV, p.328.
- 17 Wordsworth has an account of similar experiences in his childhood: 'Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality'. Lionel Trilling relates this to Freud's 'oceanic' sensations in his 'The Immortality Ode', The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society, pp. 142-143.
- 18 Donald Davie, Articulate Energy: An Inquiry into the Syntax of English Poetry, p.10.
- 19 Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, translated by Wade Baskin, p.123.
- 20 Cited in Antony Easthope, Poetry as Discourse, p.142.
- 21 Donald Davie, Purity of Diction in English Verse, p.92.
- 22 Ibid., p.99.
- 23 Even the images which are used as the main index to distinctions of character pass over into each other. For example: Bernard (154) and Rhoda (146); Rhoda (77, 163) and Neville (160), Louis (160), Bernard (161) and Jinny (162); Bernard (109, 112) and Neville (161); Bernard and Neville (81, 108, 188); Bernard (181) and Rhoda (31, 93); Neville and Bernard (160, 190).
- 24 Lee, p.164.
- 25 See Laplanche and Pontalis, pp.78-80.

- 26 Jessie Weston argues that the Gawain versions of the Grail legend, in which the hero attempts to restore the Waste Land, are older than the Perceval, 'in which the "Wasting" is brought about by the action of the hero', From Ritual to Romance, p.63.
- 27 DiBattista, pp.159 -160.
- 28 Ruddick, 'Private Brother, Public World' in Marcus (ed.), p.200.
- 29 Quentin Bell records one of Woolf's 'short but violent mental tremors', of which she wrote: 'now the old devil has once more got his spine through the waves' (QB, 2: 100).
- 30 For a related discussion of literary primitivism, see Michael Bell, Primitivism.
- 31 Kristeva, Chinese Women, p.38.
- 32 In the diary Woolf notes: 'when I wake early I say to myself Fight, fight' (WD, 148). In her first aesthetic manifesto, 'Modern Fiction', Woolf's argument ends on a little remarked note of pugnacity. The first part of the essay argues that the false totalities of realist narrative must be dissolved into a passive, Impressionistic receptivity. But lest this deliquescence go too far, the essay finally turns round on itself and valorises a native English instinct to 'enjoy and fight', to impose a 'vision', over the spiritually subtilized but helpless 'inconclusiveness' of the Russians (CE, 2: 109).



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